

# World War – II

## An Analytical Study



Editor: Lieutenant Colonel Muhammad Ilyas, AEC

Institute for Strategic Studies, Research and Analysis  
National Defence University, Islamabad

*Military History Presentations Series*

# **World War – II An Analytical Study**

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**Compiled & Edited by**

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## FOREWORD

The World War II was a medley of military conflicts which had devastating, yet discernible effects on international political order. During the course of this War, remarkable new means and methods of war fighting were invented. When viewed in retrospect, one can see how the developments in political and military dimensions synchronized in a time spectrum produced a conflict of such magnitude. The effects of Treaty of Versailles coupled with economic depression accentuated propagation of leftist ideologues and fomented revolutionaries to inspire large masses on nationalist pretensions. Authoritarianism and militarily expansionism spread, and a large and significant part of the Globe was embroiled in the conflict with serious repercussions on the lives of common masses. Hitler's political rise coincided with the ever enhancing industrial capacity and military developments of the time which inspired him to realize his political ideology.



This book presents a broad account of this scene. I must commend the efforts of the ISSRA and the Editor in presenting a wholesome analytical account of the research



work executed by our Armed Forces War Course/ National Security and War Course Officers. I am confident that National and Military History Cell in ISSRA will continue its efforts for improving both the quality of research as well as the quantum of publications in this domain of history.

**Lt Gen Nazir Ahmed Butt, HI (M)**  
President, National Defence University

## PREFACE

Military history is one of the academic subject areas in which the military officers must excel. This discipline is surely a treasure trove of manifested acumen and judgment displayed by military geniuses on the battle-field.



Notwithstanding the fact that probability of such a war in near future is very remote, WW-II still makes an interesting case study for students of theory of war and strategy for host of reasons. The war was conducted on an enormous scale encompassing Europe, Asia, Africa and Pacific regions. The World War-II also saw combined and joint employment of land, air and sea powers on a grand scale. It was strategically decisive. Unlike WW-I which reproduced almost a similar balance of power with the exceptional demise of Anglo-Hungarian Empire, WW-II on the contrary completely upset the balance of power equation. It provided opportunities to test operational concepts and military hardware developed during inter - war period; employment of air power, submarines, and concepts such as Blitzkrieg etc - to name a few. The war was total in Clausewitzian term, and the room for compromise rarely existed during conduct of war. The war witnessed both advent and impact of nuclear

weapons; it was the use of nuclear weapon by USA which brought the war in Pacific to an abrupt end.

Whatever the battle field witnessed, it had its roots in the politico-military aims/goals of the states involved. It were these aims/goals which guided the strategies, hence these carry immense value for the students of military history.

It is hoped that the series of military history presentations compiled by National and Military History Cell, will help military officers, particularly the young officers, develop a flavour for the subject of military history, which is so essential for a better understanding of military science and art.

**Maj Gen Noel I. Khokhar, HI (M)**

Director General

Institute for Strategic Studies, Research and Analysis

## **GLOSSARY**

Aachen	The German city located near the Belgian border, was a pivotal battleground for American soldiers breaching the fortified Siegfried Line in the fall of 1944. Much of the city was destroyed and both sides suffered heavy losses. It was one of the largest urban battles fought by U.S. forces in World War-II, and the first city on German soil to be captured by the Allies.
ABC - 1	A series of secret discussions between United States and British military staff on American, British and Canadian (ABC) military coordination in the event of U.S. entry into World War II, and took place in Washington, D.C. from January 29, 1941 to March 27, 1941 and concluded with a report entitled "ABC-1".
Abteilung	German battalion or detachment
Adlerhorst	Eagle's Nest, codename for Hitler's HQ at Ziegenberg
AEF	American Expeditionary Force, First World War US Army in France
AMGOT	Allied Military Government for Occupied Territories
AOR	Area of Responsibility
Army Group 'B'	Field Marshal Walther Model's Heeresgruppe B, with Operational Command of Herbstnebel

Army Group 'G'	Heeresgruppe G, south of Model's 'B', led by Hermann Black (until 24 December 1944), subsequently Johannes Blaskowitz
Army Group 'H'	Heeresgruppe H, north of Model's 'B', led by Kurt Student
Aufklarungs	German military term meaning reconnaissance
Autarky	Self-sufficiency, independence; specifically: national economic self-sufficiency and independence
Allies	In World War - II the chief Allied powers were Great Britain, France (except during the German occupation, 1940-44), the Soviet Union (after its entry in June 1941), the United States (after its entry on December 8, 1941), and China.
Axis	The coalition headed by Germany, Italy, and Japan that opposed the Allies in World War II. The alliance originated in a series of agreements between Germany and Italy, followed by the proclamation of an "axis" binding Rome and Berlin (October 25, 1936), with the two powers claiming that the world would henceforth rotate on the Rome-Berlin axis.
Anti Comintern Pact	Agreement concluded first between Germany and Japan (Nov. 25, 1936) and then between Italy, Germany, and Japan (November 6, 1937), ostensibly directed against the Communist International (Comintern) but, by implication, specifically against the Soviet Union.
Afrika Corps	Or German Africa Corps was the German expeditionary force in Africa during the North African Campaign of World War-II. Its major engagements included Siege of Tobruk, Battle of Gazala, Battleaxe 2nd Battle of El Alamein.

	Notable commanders were Erwin Rommel, Ludwig Crüwell and Walther Nehring.
Barbarossa, Operation	On 22 June 1941 Germany invaded the Soviet Union. Codenamed Operation Barbarossa, it was the largest military operation in history, involving more than 3 million Axis troops and 3,500 tanks.
Beck, Ludwig August Theodor	Beck (29 June 1880 – 21 July 1944) was a German General and Chief of the German General Staff during the early years of the Nazi regime before World War II. In serving as Chief of Staff of the German Army between 1935 and 1938, Beck became increasingly disillusioned in this respect, standing in opposition to the increasing totalitarianism of the Nazi regime and Hitler's aggressive foreign policy. He became a major leader within the conspiracy against Hitler, and would have been provisional head of state had the 20 July plot succeeded, but when the plot failed, Beck was arrested, and was shot dead.
Bolshevik	Member of a wing of the Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party, which, led by Lenin, seized control of the government in Russia (October 1917) and became the dominant political power.
Bir Hakeim, Battle of	The Battle of Bir Hakeim took place at Bir Hakeim, an oasis in the Libyan desert south and west of Tobruk, during the Battle of Gazala (26 May – 21 June 1942).
British Expeditionary Force (BEF)	The Force went to northern France at the start of World Wars I and II in order to support the left wing of the French armies. The BEF sent to France early in World War II (1939) was brought back to England when France fell (1940).

- Cauldron** In Battle of Ghazala on 29th 1942, Rommel retired to the Cauldron, a defensive position backing onto the British minefields, forming a base in the midst of the British defences and created a route through to the Axis side to receive supplies. He placed his armoured divisions within a formidable defensive barrier surrounded by feared 88-artillery.
- Centre of gravity** Clausewitz states, "Out of the characteristics a certain center of gravity develops, the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends. That is the point against which all our energies should be directed."
- Combined Chiefs of Staffs (CCS)** CCS was the supreme military staff for the Western Allies during World War II. It emerged from the meetings of the Arcadia Conference in December 1941. The CCS was constituted from the British Chiefs of Staff Committee and the American Joint Chiefs of Staff that was created, in part to present a common front. The CCS charter was approved by President Roosevelt 21 April 1942.
- Comintern** The COMINTERN (Communist International) was a Soviet-controlled organization that conducted liaison with the national communist parties of various countries, including the United States, in order to further the cause of revolution. Moscow issued guidance, support, and orders to the parties through the apparatus of the COMINTERN. Also called the Comintern or Third International, it was founded in Moscow in March 1919.
- Continental Balance** World War II, the second round of the German war, broke Britain's power. Britain lost the war and emerged vastly weaker economically and militarily. Though it retained its empire, its ability to hold it depended on the other

states. Britain no longer could hold it unilaterally. This was the shift in continental balance.

Danzig	The first shots of World War II, however, were fired at a target that may have been more symbolic than strategic – Danzig, an ethnically German city located northwest of Warsaw on the Baltic Sea coast that had been part of Germany from the early 1800's until the end of World War I. After WWI, the Versailles Treaty made former Prussian city of Danzig a quasi-independent city-state. The Polish wanted Danzig within its boundaries, but the predominantly ethnic German city wished for the status quo. When the Nazi Party rose to power in Germany, many recruitment efforts by the party were active in Danzig. Unlike previous annexations of Austria and Memelland, Hitler treated Danzig somewhat differently. He intended to use it as a catalyst to provoke war with Poland.
Das Reich	German 2nd SS Panzer Division
Der Fuhrer	Regiment of DAs Reich Division
Division	The smallest standard combined-arms formation, 10,000-15,000 men in strength and usually commanded by a major-general.
DR, Deutsche Reichsbahn	German Railways; the primary method of transport in Germany during the Nazi era, both before and during the World War II, was the rail system. Germany had one of the finest, if not the best rail system in the world.
Fahnenjunker	Officer cadet, all German officers had to serve in the ranks before commissioning.
Field-Marshal Kesselring	He, as German commander in chief, south, became one of Hitler's top defensive strategists



	during World War II. Early in the War, Kesselring commanded air fleets in Poland (September 1939) and France (May–June 1940) and during the Battle of Britain (1940–41).
Field-Marshal Von	He was one of Hitler's ablest leaders. He held commands on both the Eastern and Western fronts, played a major role in defeating France in 1940, and led much of the opposition to the Allied offensive in the West in 1944–45
Force K	Force K (created in 1941) was the name given to a Royal Navy task force that was based at Malta. Force K was tasked with disrupting as much as possible the Axis maritime supply routes to North Africa thus weakening the power of Erwin Rommel's Afrika Korps.
Führerprinzip	The Führerprinzip (German for "leader principle") prescribed the fundamental basis of political authority in the governmental structures of the Third Reich. As early as July 1921, Hitler had declared the Führerprinzip to be the law of the Nazi Party; and in Mein Kampf (1925–27) he asserted that such a dictatorship would be extended to the coming Third Reich.
Fueller, JFC	British army officer, military theoretician, and war historian who became one of the founders of modern armoured warfare.
Generaloberst	In the German Reich, the second highest general officer rank comparable to the then four-star rank in many NATO-Armed forces
Gestapo	It was German secret police under Nazi rule. It ruthlessly suppressed opposition to the Nazis in Germany and occupied Europe. The name is German, from Geheime Staatspolizei 'secret state police'.

Granade	Allied operation launched with Operation Veritable
Granadier	German Infantryman
Gross Deutschland	Greater Germany / name of elite German division
Gruppe	Group (usually German air force)
Gruppenfuhrer	SS rank equivalent to Major - General
Halifax	RAF four-engined bomber, manufactured by Handley-page
Hallifax, Lord	British Foreign Secretary under Prime Minister Chamberlain. After the outbreak of WWII, Halifax continued as Foreign Secretary, and even when Chamberlain resigned and Churchill succeeded him as Prime Minister, Churchill kept Hallifax as Foreign Secretary.
Hart, Liddle	First published in the year after his death In 1970, Liddell Hart's "History of the Second World War" is a classic military tome from one of the best military strategists of his generation. With his distinctive voice, he covers the most famous of all wars with seering insight and authoritative knowledge of tactics and strategy.
Hauptquartier	Headquarters
Herbstnebel	'Autumn Mist' (or Fog), final German codename for Ardennes offensive
K-rations	US individual packaged meal units for breakfast, lunch and supper
Kampfgruppe	(Plural Kampfgruppen) German combat group of variable size often a combined arms task force, typically named after its leader

Kampfwert	German military term meaning combat readiness state
'Karpaty' (Carpathians)	Carpathian Mountains, a geologically young European mountain chain forming the eastward continuation of the Alps. From the Danube Gap, near Bratislava, Slovakia, they swing in a wide crescent-shaped arc some 900 miles (1,450 kilometres) long to near Orsova, Romania, at the portion of the Danube River valley called the Iron Gate. Although a counterpart of the Alps, the Carpathians differ considerably from them. Their structure is less compact, and they are split up into a number of mountain blocks separated by basins.
Kessel and keil	It was German Army's favorite tactic. Keil means wedge: the Army drives tanks and armored vehicles into the enemy mass. Kessel means kettle: infantry units encircle the cut mass, drive it into a kettle-shaped trap.
Khalkin – Gol/ Nomonhan	Battle of Khalkhin Gol (May-September, 1939)–also known as the Nomonhan Incident. Some historians consider this battle very significant given that Stalin now knew his troops could handle the Japanese, and the Soviet victory at Khalkhin Gol ensured that Japan would not intervene when the Soviet Union joined the new European war in Poland on September 17, 1939.
Kraków and Lodz	Cities in southern and central Poland, which were captured by Nazi armored spearheads in September 1939
Kraut	Allied slang for German soldier
Kriegsakademie	German military staff college in Berlin, two-year course

Kriegsberichter	German war correspondent
'Kutno' Battle	Battle of the Bzura, also known as Battle of Kutno to the Germans, the largest battle of the Polish campaign, ended on 22 September 1939, in Polish defeat; during it more than 18,000 Polish troops and about 8,000 German troops were killed.
Kutrzeba's Army	During the invasion of Poland in 1939, General Kutrzeba commanded the Poznan Army, composed of four Infantry divisions (14, 17, 25, 26) and two cavalry brigades (Wielkopolska and Podolska). He devised the Polish counterattack plan of the battle of Bzura and commanded the Poznan and Pomorze Armies during the battle.
Kwantung Army	Established in Manchuria, this Army Group was considered the elite of Japan's armed forces during late 1920s and 1930s. However its prestige had declined greatly by the time of its ultimate surrender to the Soviet Army in 1945.
Lend Lease Act	Passed in March 11, 1941, it was the principal means for providing U.S. military aid to foreign nations during World War - II. The act authorized the president to transfer arms or any other defence materials for which Congress appropriated money to "the government of any country whose defence the President deems vital to the defence of the United States." The Allies received weapons under this law.
Leon Trotsky	Communist theorist and agitator, a leader in Russia's October Revolution in 1917, and later commissar of foreign affairs and of war in the Soviet Union (1917-24). In the struggle for power following Lenin's death, however, Joseph Stalin emerged as victor, while Trotsky was removed from all positions of power and

later exiled (1929). He remained the leader of an anti-Stalinist opposition abroad until his assassination by a Stalinist agent in August 21, 1940.

Lebensraum	Lebensraum, or 'living space', was a Nazi policy during WW-II to conquer territory in Europe for German use. However, the first mention of Lebensraum actually dates back to 1901. A geographer named Friedrich Ratzel began looking at the ways plants, animals, and men adapted to and competed for living space.
Loshiem Gap	An eight kilometers long, narrow valley at the western foot of the Schnee Eifel, on the border of Belgium and Germany.
Mag not Line	This French line of defense was constructed along the country's border with Germany during the 1930s and named after Minister of War André Maginot. Despite its strength and elaborate design, the line was unable to prevent an invasion by German troops who entered France via Belgium in May 1940.
Maskirovka	It is military deception meant to mislead enemy forces during warfare. The Soviets invented the art of maskirovka, and perfected it over the course of World War II.
Mein Kampf	"My Struggle" is an autobiography by the national socialist leader Adolf Hitler, in which he outlined his political ideology and future plans for Germany. Volume 1 of Mein Kampf was published in 1925 and Volume 2 in 1926. Although it is thought of as having been 'written' by Hitler, Mein Kampf is not a book in the usual sense. Hitler dictated it to Rudolf Hess while pacing around his prison cell in 1923-24 and later at an inn at Berchtesgaden.

- Meuse River** A major European river, rising in France and flowing through Belgium and the Netherlands before draining into the North Sea. The valley of the Meuse River is a natural barrier that has historically formed part of the defenses on the approach to the heart of the Paris Basin from the east. Its line has given great strategic importance to the fortress of Verdun and was the scene of heavy fighting in World War I. During World War II, the crossing of the Meuse River capped the successful German breakthrough into France in May 1940.
- Mikhail V.** A prominent Bolshevik commander in the Civil War (1918-21) and a military theoretician. Frunze considered the basic conditions for the vitality of doctrine to be, first, its uniformity, i.e., doctrine should be the same for all services of the armed forces, and, second, "its conformity with the state's objectives and the resources at its disposal."
- Modlin Army** It was one of the Polish armies that took part in the Invasion of Poland in 1939.
- Molotov-Ribbenstop Pact (Non Aggression Pact)** Nonaggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union (named after the Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov and the German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop) that was concluded only a few days before the beginning of World War II and which divided eastern Europe into German and Soviet spheres of influence.
- Narve Group** One of the bloodiest in World War-II, the Battle of Narva was a military campaign between the German Army Detachment "Narwa" and the Soviet Leningrad Front fought for possession of the strategically important Narva Isthmus on 2 February – 10 August 1944 during World War II.

OKW	The Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW, "Supreme Command of the Armed Forces") was part of the command structure of the Wehrmacht (armed forces) of Nazi Germany during World War II. Created in 1938, the OKW had nominal oversight. During the war the OKW, subordinate to Adolf Hitler as Supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht, acquired more and more operational powers. By 1942 OKW had responsibility for all theaters except for the Eastern Front against the Soviet Union. Hitler manipulated the bipolar system to keep ultimate decisions in his own hands
Operation Crusader	Operation Crusader was a British military operation in North Africa during World War II that resulted in the liberation of Tobruk, Libya from Axis forces. Anti-tank weapons played an important role in this Operation. Operation Crusader was launched on November 19, 1941, after Britain's Eighth Army had been reorganized.
Operation Iron Clad	The invasion of Madagascar (or Operation Ironclad) was the Allied campaign to capture Vichy French -controlled Madagascar during World War - II. The Operation began on 5 May 1942.
Operation Nordwind	Operation "North Wind" was the last major German offensive of World War II on the Western Front. It began on 1 January 1945 in Alsace and Lorraine in northeastern France, South of where the Battle of the Bulge was fought, and it ended on 25 January. The offensive was to break through the lines of the U.S. 7th Army and French 1st Army and destroy them.
Operation Torch	Operation Torch was the name given to the Allied invasion of French North Africa in

November 1942. Operation Torch was the first time the British and Americans had jointly worked on an invasion plan together.

**Paulus, Friedrich General** German field marshal whose advance on Stalingrad in the summer and fall of 1942 represented the high-water mark of Nazi military expansion. Cut off by a Soviet counteroffensive and denied the option of retreat by German leader Adolf Hitler, Paulus was forced to surrender what was left of his army in early 1943, a defeat that became one of the turning points of World War II.

**Plan 1919** Plan 1919 originated in a paper written by a junior staff officer in the British Army, J.F. C. Fuller. His plan criticised the practice of physically destroying the enemy, and instead called for tanks to rapidly advance into the enemy's rear area to destroy supply bases and lines of communication, which would also be bombed. Fuller argued that, under the new conditions prevailing on the battlefield in late 1918, breaching a defense line or routing and encircling an enemy formation was no longer enough.

**Plan 'Dog'** After President Roosevelt was reelected in November 1940, Admiral Harold Stark drafted a memorandum that considered four alternative courses of grand strategy. After analyzing each, Stark recommended Plan D: Hold the line in the Pacific, put most of the effort into defeating Germany. This "Plan Dog Memorandum" is considered one of the most important single documents drafted during the U.S. prewar period.

**Plan Yellow** Following Hitler's attack on Poland in 1939, Britain and France had seen little real fighting and passed through a tense period of anticipation ~ which came to be known as the



	<p>'Phoney War'. It met an abrupt end on 10 May 1940, when Germany launched an invasion of France and the Low Countries. The German plan of attack, codenamed Case Yellow, entailed an armoured offensive through the Ardennes Forest, which bypassed the strong French frontier defences of the Maginot Line.</p>
Polesie	<p>It was one of the Polish corps that defended Poland during the invasion of Poland in 1939. It was created on 11 September 1939 and was commanded by General Franciszek Kleeberg.</p>
Pomeranian Corridor (Polish Corridor)	<p>Strip of land, 20 to 70 miles wide, that gave the newly reconstituted state of Poland access to the Baltic Sea after World War I. The corridor lay along the lower course of the Vistula River and consisted of West Prussia and most of the province of Posen (Poznan), which the Treaty of Versailles (1919) transferred from defeated Germany to Poland. The corridor ran between Pomerania and East Prussia and separated the latter province from the main body of the German Reich to the west.</p>
Pomorze Army	<p>One of the Polish Armies, it was created on March 23, 1939. It was led by General Wladyslaw Bortnowski, and consisted of 5 infantry divisions and 1 cavalry brigade.</p>
Positional warfare	<p>A form of warfare conducted along permanent and fortified front lines. The war of positions came to characterize the First World War in contrast to other forms of combat. After the Battle of the Salient, Rommel reflected on the difference between mobile and positional warfare in the desert. He stated: (in) position warfare, (where) the infantryman with rifle and hand grenade has lost little of his value, provided, of course, he is protected by antitank guns or obstacles against the enemy's armour. For him enemy number one</p>

is the attacking infantrymen. Hence, position warfare is always a struggle for the destruction of men – in contrast to mobile warfare, where everything turns on the destruction of enemy material.

**Pripet Marshes** A huge swampy region 220 miles wide and 120 miles deep beginning some 170 miles east of Warsaw that effectively divided the front in half, mostly lie within the Polesian Lowland and occupy most of the southern part of Belarus and the north-west of Ukraine. Served as a hideout for Soviet and Polish partisans. During the German invasion of the Soviet Union, the German armies had skirted the wetlands, passing to the north or to the south of them. But after the debacle of the Eastern Front in 1944 many retreating units such as the 7th, 35th, 134th and 292nd Infantry Divisions had to cut across these marshy areas.

**RAINBOW-5** Rainbow Five and the rainbow plans which preceded it were drafted between 1939 and 1941 and were based on five hypothetical situations. Rainbow Five, which ultimately became the foundation for U.S. strategy during World War II, provided that the United States was allied with both Britain and France, and the United States would be involved in offensive operations in Europe and possibly even North Africa. Rainbow Five was the culmination of nearly fifty years of war planning experience and the fruits of a military reform movement which began before the turn of the 20th century.

**Rapallo Agreement** Treaty of Rapallo, was signed on April 16, 1922 between Germany and the Soviet Union, at Rapallo, Italy. It reestablished normal relations between the two nations.

Rhineland	Historically controversial area of western Europe lying in western Germany along both banks of the middle Rhine River. It lies east of Germany's border with France, Luxembourg, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Adolf Hitler on March 7, 1936, repudiated the Rhineland clauses of the Treaty of Versailles and the Locarno Pact and announced that German troops had entered the demilitarized zone of the Rhineland.
Rommel Papers	When Erwin Rommel died by forced suicide at Hitler's command he left behind in various ingenious hiding places the papers that recorded the story of his dramatic career and the exact details of his masterly campaigns. In 1953 Rommel's writings of the war period were published as <i>The Rommel Papers</i> , and were edited by Liddell Hart.
Schlieffen Plan	A battle plan first proposed in 1905 by Alfred, Graf (count) von Schlieffen, chief of the German general staff, that was designed to allow Germany to wage a successful two-front war against France and Russia. The plan was heavily modified by Schlieffen's successor, Helmuth von Moltke, prior to and during its implementation in World War I.
Schwimmwagen	German amphibious jeep manufactured by VW
Scorched Earth	A military policy whereby retreating armies destroy or dismantled everything in their path in order to deprive the advancing armies of food, shelter, natural resources, manufacturing, communications, or anything else that may be of use to them. Scorched earth has a devastating impact on civilian populations left behind by retreating armies.
Seeckt, Hans	The commander in chief of the German Army from 1920 to 1926, he played a pivotal role

	in shaping the evolution of the interwar German military. The mobility and fast-paced offensive orientation that both Seeckt instilled in the interwar German Army played an important role in Germany's dramatic Blitzkrieg victories during the early years of World War II.
SHAEF	Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, in Versailles, codename 'Shellburst'
Sherman	The M-4 standard Allied tank of 1943-5
Siegfried Line	The Siegfried Line was a series of fortifications on the western border of Germany, stretching more than 390 miles from Kleve, near the Dutch border, all the way to Weil am Rhein near the border of Switzerland. Called the Westwall by the Germans, it was built between 1938 and 1940 and is made of more than 18,000 pillboxes and tank traps. Was built to screen Nazi Germany in from an attack from the West and was partially built in reaction to the construction of the French Maginot Line.
SIGINT	Signal intelligence
Silver Star	US award for valour above Bronze Star, below Distinguished Service Cross, established 1918
Sippenhaft	Guilt and punishment extended by the Nazis to families of those accused of treason after 20 July 1944
Skyline Drive	GI name for road that ran from St Vith to Diekirch, on high ground west of and parallel to river Our
SLOCs	Sea lines of communication
SLU	Special Liaison Unit, Ultra - cleared liaison officers.
SS Panzer	The Waffen-SS was created as the armed wing of the Nazi Party's Schutzstaffel (SS,

	"Protective Squadron"). Its military formations included men from Nazi Germany, along with volunteers and conscripts from both occupied and un-occupied lands. The Waffen-SS grew from three regiments to over 38 divisions during World War II, and served alongside the Heer (regular army) but was never formally part of it.
St. Vith	The Battle of St. Vith was part of the Battle of the Bulge, which began on 16 December 1944. The town of St. Vith, a vital road junction, was close to the boundary between the 5th and Sepp Dietrich's Sixth Panzer Army, the two strongest units of the attack.
Stavka	The Stavka was the Soviet armed forces high command, set up by the day after Hitler's invasion. Its role was to formulate wartime military strategy. Its membership included senior government and military figures.
Standartenfuhrer	SS rank equivalent to Colonel
Stars and Stripes	US daily military newspaper, funded 1861
Storm Troop Tactics	Infiltration tactics; Storm Troopers were German soldiers trained to fight with new method of attack on enemy trenches.
Stosser	German parachute drop behind US lines
Sturmbannfuhrer	SS rank equivalent to Major
Sturmgewehr	German MP 44 assault rifle
Sturmmann	SS rank of Lance Corporal, or PFC
Stuka	Stuka (dive-bomber), a low-wing, single-engine monoplane—especially the Junkers JU 87 dive-bomber—used by the German

	Luftwaffe from 1937 to 1945, with especially telling effect during the first half of World War II.
Storm Troop	A member of a private Nazi army notorious for aggressiveness, violence, and brutality.
Sudetenland	Mountainous region in the N Czech Republic, including the Sudeten and the Erzgebirge: annexed by Germany 1938; returned to Czechoslovakia in 1945.
Swanton	The former Royal Air Force Station Swanton Morley, more commonly known as RAF Swanton Morley, was a Royal Air Force Station in Norfolk, England. During World War II the station was home to the Bomber Support Development Unit.
The Third Reich	Official Nazi designation for the regime in Germany from January 1933 to May 1945, as the presumed successor of the medieval and early modern Holy Roman Empire of 800 to 1806 (the First Reich) and the German Empire of 1871 to 1918 (the Second Reich).
The Indirect Approach	Following World War – I, basing on Liddle Hart's deliberations, this strategy was derived. In Hart's words, 'In strategy the longest way round is often the shortest way there; a direct approach to the object exhausts the attacker and hardens the resistance by compression, whereas an indirect approach loosens the defender's hold by upsetting his balance'.
Treaty of Versailles	A peace document signed at the end of World War - I by the Allied and Associated Powers and by Germany in the Hall of Mirrors in the Palace of Versailles, France, on June 28, 1919; it took force on January 10, 1920.
Tripartite Pact	On 27 September, 1940, the Axis powers Germany, Italy, and Japan became allies with the signing of the Tripartite Pact in Berlin.

Tukhachevsky, Mikhayl Nikolayevich	Soviet military chief responsible for modernization of the Red Army prior to World War II.
U Boats	U-boat (undersea boat) was name given to German submarine. The destruction of enemy shipping by German U-boats was a spectacular feature of World Wars I and II. In World War II Germany built 1,162 U-boats, of which 785 were destroyed and the remainder surrendered
Untermensch	Used in Nazi racial ideology, the expression meant subhumans or inferior (its opposite is Übermensch, the superior man).
Volksgemeinschaft	It was a perfect "people's Community" (Volksgemeinschaft) – the propaganda concept Hitler used when he came to power in 1933, 30th January. Hitler promised to unify Germany into a Volksgemeinschaft, but he only wanted the perfect Germans to be part of his people's community, dividing the German people into two groups; the National Comrades, like the Aryans who were to be part of the people's community and the Community Aliens who would have been disposed of.
Volksgrenadier	A type of German Army division formed in the Autumn of 1944.
Voroshilov, Kliment	Military and political leader of the Soviet Union who served as head of state after the death of his close friend and collaborator Joseph Stalin.
Zhukov, Gregory	Zhukov was the most successful Russian general in World War – II. He effectively led the attack on Berlin in April/May 1945 and throughout the whole Russian campaign was known as the 'man who did not lose a battle'

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# ***Part One***

## **POLITICO - MILITARY AIMS AND STRATEGIES OF AXIS AND ALLIES IN EUROPEAN THEATRE**

### ***Study Panel***

Lt Col Tahir Hussain (Leader)  
Lt Col Muhammad Shafique  
Capt Altaf Habib (PN)  
Lt Col Bader Al Duweis (KSA)  
Col Lindsey Macduff (UK)

(2010-2011)



## *CHAPTER - I*

# **GEO - STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT 1938-39**

World War – II, one of the deadliest conflicts in human history, was a manifestation of E.D Vattel's theory who had predicted nearly two hundred years ago that once an armistice is forced upon by the stronger, on the weaker, the later would annul it on the first available opportunity. World War – II was in many ways a continuation of left over disputes of the First World War. Almost all the affected states sought solutions for their economic problems in an independent nationalistic approach, seeking revival of lost glory and prestige, with Germany taking the lead. Brief highlights of the geo-strategic environment prevailing in 1939 are imperative to be taken in complete account.

Germans were the most aggrieved after World War-I **(Map-1)**. Liddell Hart correctly identified, "History shows that as a rule, Armies learn from defeat but not from victory that it is the losing side which turns to account the lessons of a war, while the victors become dangerously complacent". The important events that led to German's rise in power in Europe and ultimately to war were many. To alleviate the stringent conditions of treaty of Versailles, Germany entered into "Rappello Agreement" with Bolshevik USSR in 1922 to mutually work for future economic cooperation. Then Hitler took Germany out of the League of Nations in 1933. In March 1935, Hitler, unilaterally annulled the Treaty of Versailles. Through a

unilatera. agreement with Britain in June 1935, Germany was allowed to bring her nava strength up to 35 % of the British. Hitler overcame economic crises by gearing up his defence industry. From 1936 to March 1939, H tier re-occupied the Rhineland, invaded and annexed Austria occupied entire Czechoslovakia and began threatening the Polish Corridor. Germany concluded the Ant. Comintern Pact with Japan and a year later Italy also joined. This brought into being the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis. Germany and USSR signed the 10 years Pact of Non-Aggression on 23 Aug 1939.

Italian dictator, Benito Mussolini came to power in 1923 and annexed Ethiopia in 1936. Italy backed the Spanish rebels under General Francisco Franco to win the Spanish Civil War by using German weapons and other material support. It also seized Albania in 1939 and agreed to fight on Germany's side in case of war. The Japanese defined national security in terms of East Asian hegemony through powerful armed forces and seized Manchuria in 1931 and began a war against China in 1937. Pearl Harbour and American bases in the Philippines could threaten the Japanese interests. Out of these imperatives, Japan's war plans emerged.

Britain followed a policy of appeasement towards Germany between 1937 and 1939 to avoid another war. In March 1939, Britain announced that it would support Poland if Germany invaded it. In this backdrop Britain declared war on Germany, reluctantly, on September 3, 1939 after German invasion of Poland. In May 1940, Winston Churchill replaced Neville Chamberlain as the Prime Minister of Great Britain. In 1923 France occupied the Ruhr and took measures leading to the financial ruin of Germany. M Follick writes "The new Germany was

brought into being by France herself: by French tyranny, by French violence, and by French oppression”.

USSR having formed “Communist International” (Comintern), aspired to spread Communism in the Western Europe to enhance her influence in the world. Stalin for the expansion of his Bolshevik empire had eyes fixed on Finland, Latvia, Estonia, Eastern Poland and Eastern Romania. Soviet Union signed a non aggression pact with Germany in 1939 including a secret clause of partitioning Poland, the Baltic Republics and Finland between the two spheres of interest. In September 1939, the Soviets invaded Eastern Poland and Finland in November 1939.

United States senate declined to ratify the Treaty of Versailles (**Map-2**), remained inactive in League of Nations and withdrew into self isolation. In 1929, Great Depression began in the United States which slowed down Europe’s economic recovery. USA approached Britain, France, Germany and Czechoslovakia for arbitration of the “Sudetenland crisis”. This set the stage for the Munich Pact in 1938 between Nazi Germany, France, Britain and Italy. This agreement was widely regarded as a failed act of appeasement towards Nazi Germany. USA was neutral when World War - II started in Europe in September, 1939. On the whole, the international environment in late 1930s was fast mutating due to interplay of various forces primarily serving respective national interests while gradually realigning the world for yet another world war

## *CHAPTER - II*

### **POLITICAL AND MILITARY AIMS AND STRATEGIES – AXIS**

In the aftermath of World War - I, the political order of Europe came crashing to the ground. Victors and vanquished alike, faced an enormous recovery challenge after four years of financial loss, economic deprivation and material destruction as the war damaged the economies of almost all European countries. Both the winners and losers came out of the war deeply indebted. The defeated powers had difficulty paying reparations to the victors and the victors had difficulty repaying loan to the United States. Germany and its six allies were known as the Axis. The Allied and Axis countries had circled the globe in World War - II. The Allies mobilized about 62 million men and women, while the Axis mobilized about half that number.

On 12 Mar 1938, proclaiming the unity of the German people, Hitler invaded Austria. Immediately, thereafter, Naz regime began agitating on behalf of the Sudeten Germans who lived in pockets of western Czechoslovakia. In September 1938, Hitler demanded immediate cession of the Sudetenland to Germany. In March 1939, Hitler destroyed what remained of Czechoslovakia by occupying Bohemia, Moravia and making Slovakia a German protectorate. He also took away Memel from Lithuania and began threatening the Polish Corridor, a narrow strip of land that separated East Prussia from the rest of the Germany. Meanwhile, in April 1939 Italy occupied

and annexed Albania. On 23 August 1939, Germany and USSR signed the 10 year Nazi-Soviet Pact of non-aggression. A secret protocol provided for the division of Poland and the Baltic states between the signatories. It meant that Germany would not have to fight a war on two fronts because Stalin was giving her way to move against Poland. It also implies that Britain and France would be without allies as they belatedly prepared to defend a beleaguered country.

### **German National/Political Aims and Objectives**

After defining the broad geo strategic environment, it is pertinent to conclude that Hitler took the advantage of it and gave Germany a goal to become a continental power by expanding the German borders to create a Great German Empire, almost double the size of the existing Reich and making Germany politically, economically and militarily strong enough to completely dominate Europe. After Hitler took over as Chancellor, the German national aim was to create a great German Empire, making Germany strong enough to totally dominate the European landscape. Political Aim was to unify all areas inhabited by ethnic Germans and establish superiority of German race. A number of political objectives were set towards the achievement of purported German broader aims. Hitler writes in his book, *Mein Kampf* "Als Reich Deutschland must alle Deutscher Haben (As a German Reich it must include all Germans)". Hitler regarded that Germans were not only distinct but superior. He desired that all Germans living in Europe to be either repatriated or German rule be extended to cover these areas. Hitler, when took over as Chancellor, mesmerized his nation by promotion of nationalism - Nazism. Hitler's concept of racial superiority emanated from his contentions that National Socialism was philosophically incompatible with communism, Bolshevism and an Eastern Europe filled



with Jews. In Hitler's mind "the Slavs were an inferior race and the Russians the most inferior of the Slavs". He also identified "Jewish Bolsheviks as our deadly enemies". By establishing a healthy and natural proportion between the number and growth of the population on the one hand and the extent and resources of the territory they inhabit on the other. He wanted to establish the German Lebensraum, which he considered essential to the economic security of Germany to safeguard the German food and war economics, and to free Germany forever from the political pressure of the East.

In chapter fourteen of the second volume of *Mein Kampf*, Hitler expounds his theory of Lebensraum in detail. He opens his argument by pointing out, "the geometrical dimensions of a state are of importance, not only as the source of the food stuffs and raw materials, but also from the political and military standpoint" Germany as long as remained confined within her then existing boundaries never could be a world power. Hitler explicitly defined territorial policy by writing, "but when we speak of new territory in Europe today, we must principally think of Russia and the bordering states around her". The vast resources and Lebensraum of the Ukraine and plains of European Russia attracted Hitler, the most.

Hitler wanted to make Germany independent of international loan-capitalism. He envisioned a system of finance, which denied US and Britain to retain monetary control in Europe. On first instance, Hitler desired to restore German might and power, which had been curtailed by the Treaty of Versailles. He envisaged establishing Germany as a military might which could force Britain the sea power, to pursue peace with Germany and recognize her as a the sole continental power of the Europe. He was prepared to allow Britain to remain the sea power, due to his incapability to threaten British naval supremacy Hitler wanted to make

Germany independent of International Loan – Capitalism through autarky and evolve a self generating economic system that should defy the US, British finance system in Europe. To overcome the economic quagmire and out of proportion unemployment, Hitler initiated in 1936 a “Four Years Economic Plan”, which brought about the complete militarization of German economy. Germany made ardent developments in fields of technology, metallurgy, chemical and electric industries. Owing to Hitler’s political and diplomatic efforts that raw materials could be imported from Soviet Union, Turkey, Rumania, Czech and Hungary, allowing Germany a definite edge in technology over her adversaries. Before embarking upon the course of War and to achieve the national aims and objectives, Germany had sufficient armament and reserves. However these could only sustain a short duration of war.

The Nazis were fascists: (A system of government marked by centralization of authority under a dictator, stringent socioeconomic controls, supersession of the opposition through terror and censorship, and typically a policy of belligerent nationalism and racism) the exact opposite of communists who ruled Russia. Hitler blamed the communists for Germany’s defeat in World War - I, and he feared that the same were trying to take over Germany; he was determined to destroy all forms of it.

### **Political Considerations Shaping German Strategy**

Hitler evolved a well orchestrated political strategy for realization of his national aims. He harboured various political considerations that shaped German strategy. Up till the middle of 1936, Hitler’s aggressive policy and treaty breaking stance had rested, not upon Germany’s strength, but upon the disunion and timidity of France and Britain and the isolation of United States. Hitler was convinced that neither Britain nor France would fight till

they were attacked. So, Germany's hegemonic designs could be manifested with preservation of her territorial integrity; the French occupation of Ruhr immediately after the Treaty of Versailles was considered an act of war. Giving the Polish corridor, i.e. Danzig to Poland was considered a crime and a violent outrage. Historians consider Danzig as trigger of World War - II like Sarajevo was the trigger of World War - I. So, Hitler's first aim was to restore German might and power curtailed by the Treaty. A number of political, considered diplomatic moves and exterior manoeuvres were resorted to preserve territorial integrity of Germany and create an environment of security. The important ones included:-

- Re-occupation of Rhineland
- Annexation of Austria
- Occupation of Sudetenland's of Czechoslovakia
- Annexation of Poland
- Invasion and occupation of Norway and Denmark thereby ensuring vital supply of iron ore from Sweden.

France had always desired to prevent Germany from being a homogeneous power and secure her own hegemony in Europe. It did so by maintaining the system of German petty states. The central and controlling aim of Hitler's policy was the total and permanent elimination of France as a great power, so that Germany could be assured of uninterrupted conquest of Eastern Europe. Isolation/ destruction of France was to expand the Reich territorially and give economic uplift to Germany. Hitler wanted to provide the traditional German pride and lead them to form a Vater and (Fatherland), a United Germany, a Great German Empire. He had envisaged two world powers, the one based on dominion in Europe and the other based on dominion of sea. German military might be able to force

British, the sea power to pursue peace with Germany; at the same time Britain was the potential threat to Hitler's grandiose plans. Perhaps the bigger concern was that Britain might close ranks with Russia, entice United States into the war and thus attack Germany on two fronts. On the other hand, Russian Communist International aspired to spread communism in the Western Europe - a looming threat to National Socialism philosophy. Hitler's dream and vision of future was to bring the continent of Europe under the aegis of Germany by eradicating the threat of Bolshevism. Hitler also identified Jew Bolsheviks as deadly enemies thus needed to be crushed. Destruction of Russia was deemed imperative to eradicate any threat from communism/ Bolshevism. Finally a non-aggression pact with Soviets was concluded in August, 1939 which was a prelude to Polish invasion for living space.

### **German National Strategy**

Unification of all the areas inhabited by ethnic Germans, and establishment of superiority of German race were the cornerstones; domination of Europe by destruction of France and expansion towards the east, i.e. achievement of Lebensraum held the key. Hitler's grand strategy was based upon his determination to win his eastern empire within a short span of time, absorb the ethnic German areas, capture France to eliminate land threat from the west, thereby Germany could emerge as a sole continental power in Europe and could also establish German Lebensraum. Key aspects of his strategy are described in ensuing paragraphs.

To achieve dominance in Europe, Hitler first sought destruction of France. In *Mein Kampf*, he wrote, "all are convinced of the necessity of regulating our situation in regard to France". Destruction of France was

aimed to expand the Reich and give economic uplift to Germany. It was to eliminate the threat from the west, especially during the conquest of Eastern Europe. Hitler was fully conscious of the fact that despite enormous war preparations he could not fight on two fronts. In order to avoid a two front war, before attacking France he secured his eastern flank by capturing Poland and entering into an alliance with USSR. While attacking France, he planned to seek peace with England. By resorting to this he could devote his entire attention and military weight in one direction against a single enemy. He, very actively pursued a broadened strategy / indirect strategy. Hitler once said, "What is war but cunning, deception, delusion, attack and surprise? There is a broadened strategy, a war with intellectual weapons. . Why should I demoralize the enemy by military means, if I can do so better and more cheaply in other ways?" Hitler fully understood the importance of propaganda strategy and applied it to its optimum in all his diplomatic manoeuvres. He fostered pessimism, doubt, fear and undermined morale and the will of his enemy to resist. Hitler said "Who says I am going to start a war like those fools in 1914; most people have no imagination, they are blind to new ideas, the surprising things." The German propaganda remained extremely successful during initial years of war. The coordinated attempts to influence public opinion were skilfully executed by Nazis. The themes like death and sacrifice, Führerprinzip, Volksgemeinschaft, blood and soil and *Heim ins Reich* were successfully propagated to all German diasporas. Newly invented radio and print media (posters) were widely used. The propaganda was run by Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda.

Germany entered into alliance with Poland, Italy, Japan, Russia, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria

and Finland. Before attacking Poland he signed a non aggression pact with Soviet Union so as to prevent her entering into alliance with France and England (**Map-3**). Hitler desired to enter into alliance with England also and showed a soft corner by allowing her forces to escape Dunkirk and again offered her peace in June 1940 after the fall of France. Hitler understood the utility of alliances especially when the war was to be fought on exaggerated frontiers. Hitler wanted to keep USA out of Europe. He understood that his relations with Britain would influence the attitude of the United States toward Nazi Germany. His apprehensions about United States were based upon the continental proportions of its territory and its relative invulnerability to attack. He hoped to neutralize the American power by a alliance with Japan, as well by the bitter struggle within the United States between isolationists and interventionists.

### **German Military Strategy**

Hitler believed in Clausewitz doctrine of absolute war and in the strategy of annihilation. He believed in war as a political instrument, therefore, as his political aim was the establishment of German Lebensraum (**Map-4**), he shaped military strategy accordingly. The strategy was based on two theories - attack by propaganda and attack by velocity of striking power. The finesse of his strategy was to 'capture territory with bold and swift manoeuvre, avoid fighting war on two fronts and create favourable environment through indirect strategy and preparatory manoeuvres'. An offensive baited gambit came into play in Belgium to attract best forces the allies had in the north, a stunning blow in the centre followed by a swift race towards English Channel to close the trap, in a space cum destruction oriented strategy.

Germans adopted a destructive strategy against Russia, with prime aim to destroy the hub of Bolshevism by news of capturing objectives like Leningrad and Kronstad in the North, followed by Moscow, thus war-waging potential could be denied to Russia by capturing the industrial conglomerate of the Donets basin in the south. Meanwhile it was planned to ensure destruction of Russian Forces through well-planned enveloping manoeuvres to encircle and destroy Russian Forces denying their escape towards east. Hitler had the initiative with him till the defeat of France. Once Hitler's invasion of Russia failed, Britain was not defeated and USA then joined the war in Europe. The strategic initiative shifted to the Allies. At this stage the German strategy, which had been so successful in the previous years, collapsed. New German strategy enunciated by Hitler was solely concerned to protect still very large area under German control in Europe as well as in the North Africa.

The Third Reich escalated its war effort in the faint hope of splitting the Allies through limited operational successes. Militarily, it turned to a course of attrition, punctuated by selective counter offensives. The events in North Africa, the great tank battles of Kursk in the East, and the battle of Bulge marked the era. More importantly, the army in the east and navy in the Atlantic became the shield behind which Third Reich stepped up its campaign against Russia. By concentrating and rationalizing his efforts towards a single elemental aim behind a slow and grinding retreat, Hitler, in this way, tried to destroy those whom he perceived to be his mortal enemies. Behind all this, was the presence of a War Termination Strategy. It is the most important planning pillar of any strategy. It is generally perceived that Hitler had no war termination strategy or his war termination strategy was flawed. The

truth is that he had such strategy and that was primarily based on his assumptions, "USA will not enter the war" and "Britain will have peace with Germany". Both of his assumptions proved wrong and he also could not enter into negotiations with Britain after invasion of USSR. He basically could not achieve desired area in USSR and also could not implement conceived war termination strategy.

**German Military Aims.** It spelled out to dominate Europe militarily and to force Britain, the sea power, to pursue peace with Germany recognizing it as the Sole Continental Power. The purported German military aims implied: to develop means for enabling Germany to wage operations by rapid economic mobilization; to conduct a preparatory manoeuvre adopting indirect strategy, i.e. avoiding strength, striking at the weakness, and achieving stunning success, to create favourable environment; to isolate the enemy by purposeful exterior manoeuvre like concluded a Non – Aggression pact with his archrival Russia before invading Poland in 1939 to divide Poland between the two and destroy his national will by application of broadened strategy; and to capture objectives / territory with bold and swift manoeuvre dealing with its adversaries in a piecemeal manner avoiding a two front scenario **(Map-5)**.

Hitler launched a massive military restructuring program in which Universal Military Service, i.e. conscription was re-introduced. Mass production of war machinery like aircrafts, tanks, motors was ushered to make infantry mechanized and compatible with tanks, artillery pieces, ships and submarines. German Air Force and Army were combed to operate in close harmony to achieve maximum/ optimum output based on speed, mobility and striking power. Hitler brought Army, Navy and Air Force High Commands under High Command of



Armed Forces to ensure coordination at tri services level. He controlled both the policy and strategy, which gave him an unlimited opportunity to prepare and develop means to achieve the desired ends. He gave a new direction and wider spectrum to the German employment strategy by selection of innovative commanders.

In the late 1930s, the German Army was able to evolve entirely new concept of offensive strategy of mechanized warfare by optimizing speed and shock action by an aircraft in the air and a tank on the ground. Developing a highly mobile form of warfare for lightning strikes and mechanized attacks, they were to contribute the art of blitzkrieg - the spearhead of a conquering, offensive strategy that Hitler planned and unleashed in World War-II. Employment of armour which was a separate arm, the Panzerwaffe, as the spearhead of army, was unlike in the contemporary Europe. Battalions formed divisions and divisions formed corps, forming an extremely strong assault force or reserves based on tanks. French tanks were scattered in penny pockets, as auxiliary weapons subservient to infantry, having little independent role. Tanks were modified to make them lighter but more mobile to travel faster and farther. Several motorized infantry divisions were raised to keep pace with armour. Stukas could compensate for slow moving heavy artillery to provide intimate fire support to the fast moving panzer formations. In the battle of Meuse specially, panzers were supported by the aerial bombardment to compensate for artillery, maintaining momentum of panzer attack. Going all out for air power, Germany achieved a superiority of 1:3 over France.

Hitler gave a new direction and wider meaning to the German employment strategy by: construction of Siegfried line which was used as ploy to show timid

defensive posture; coercive strategy used for unification of all the German areas including Austria, Sudetenland and Memel; strategic encirclement, as the absorption of Poland; and surprise and stratagem by exploiting the Ardennes through central rupture.

### **Italian Political/Military Aims and Strategies**

The treaties following the end of World War - I were unsatisfactory to Italy. The territory given to Italy by the Allies, was far less than the promised one or than the Italians thought they deserved. So World War - I left Italians dissatisfied with their government. As a result, new movement called Fascism, led by Benito Mussolini, a former socialist, gained the support of many Italians. Mussolini gave Italians a sense of pride and raised the morale of the public by providing them good governance. Preoccupied with morale and prestige, Mussolini's government pursued an active foreign policy from the start, evident from the fact that between 1935 and 1945, Italy was almost continuously at war.

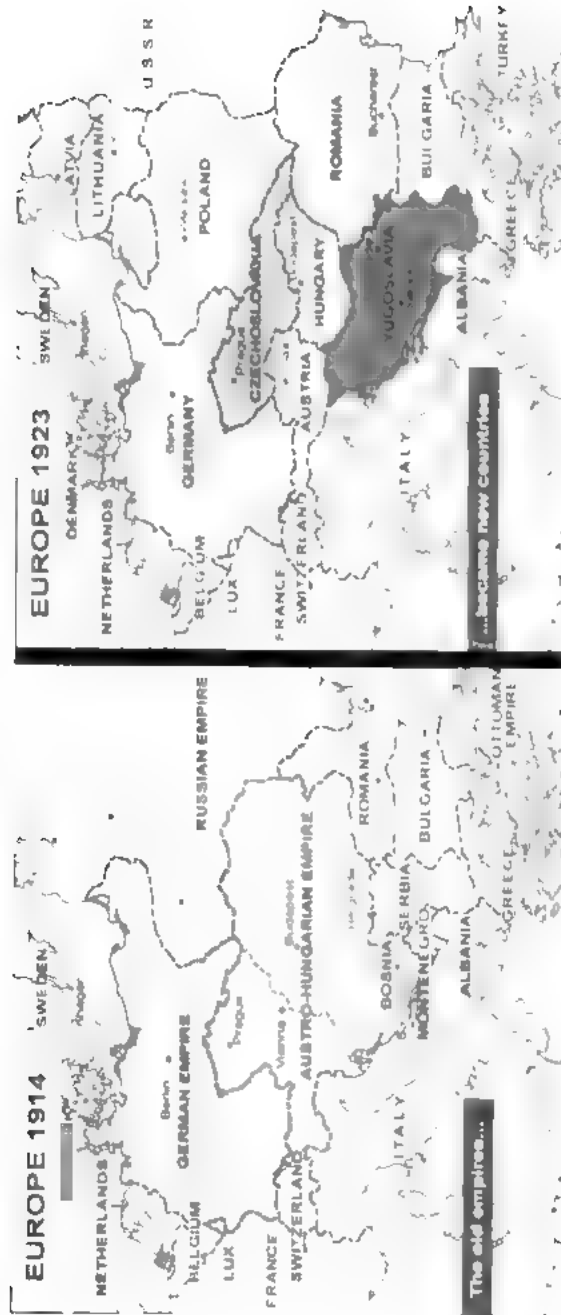
Political aims of Italy, as stated above were derived out of the theory of Fascism. The aim was re-establishment of political and social order, based upon the main current of traditions that have formed European civilization, traditions created by Roman Empire and Catholic Church. To Mussolini, the strength of Fascism depended upon Italian flexibility and consciousness of the ancient glories of Italy. Having anti communistic sentiments, the Fascists believed in expansion of Italy on the Mediterranean to exercise control in her sphere of influence in Europe. Hitler and Mussolini joined hands in an alliance for the division of eastern and south-eastern Europe into German and Italian spheres of influence. Italian national strategy was multi-pronged. Mussolini, willing though he was to see

Germany compete with France for influence in Eastern Europe, however, did not want Italy to be overshadowed on its northern frontier by a strong Germany. His intentions were to save/ preserve Austria from having to depend on Germany. Mussolini's motive in forming the Shesa Front with Britain and France was to deter Germany from taking action against Austria at a time when the greater part of Italy's forces would be occupied overseas namely in the conquest of Ethiopia. Thus Italian designs were to counter the threat of communism in Southern and Eastern Europe, and exercise her command over Mediterranean sea routes.

Italian military strategy was based on to maintain and use credible armed forces to exercise control over sphere of influence through land, air and sea (**Map-6**). The events that unfolded its military strategy are:-

- Aspired to become a Mediterranean power and planned to seize Suez Canal and Strait of Gibraltar.
- **Mussolini conquered Ethiopia in 1936.**
- Sent 70000 men to help the rebels under Francisco Franco to win the Spanish Civil War.
- Joined hands with Germany for a common foreign policy to formulate Rome – Berlin Axis.
- Italy seized Albania in 1939 and agreed to fight on Germany's side in case of war.
- She stayed out of war until June 1940. Later Italian army met with humiliating defeats in North Africa and Greece. The African conflict against the British Army resulted in the loss of a large part of the army. Mussolini then became the subservient partner in the Rome-Berlin Axis.

Map 1





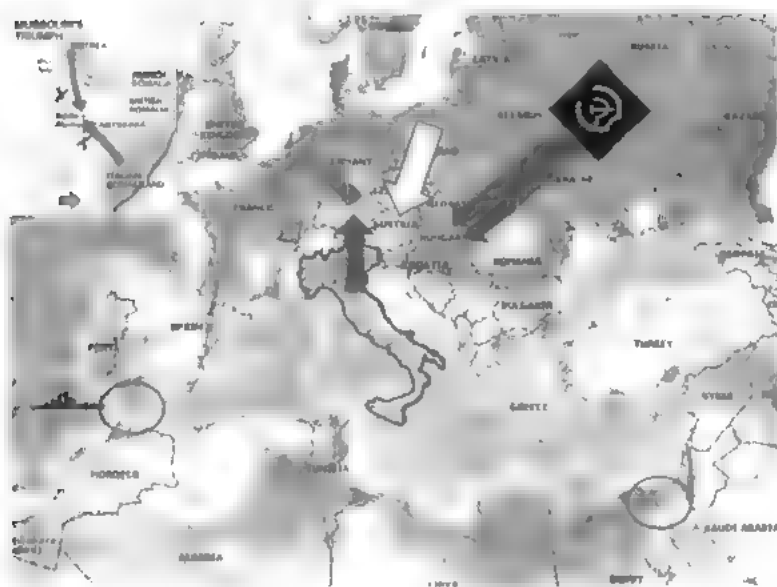
Map 4



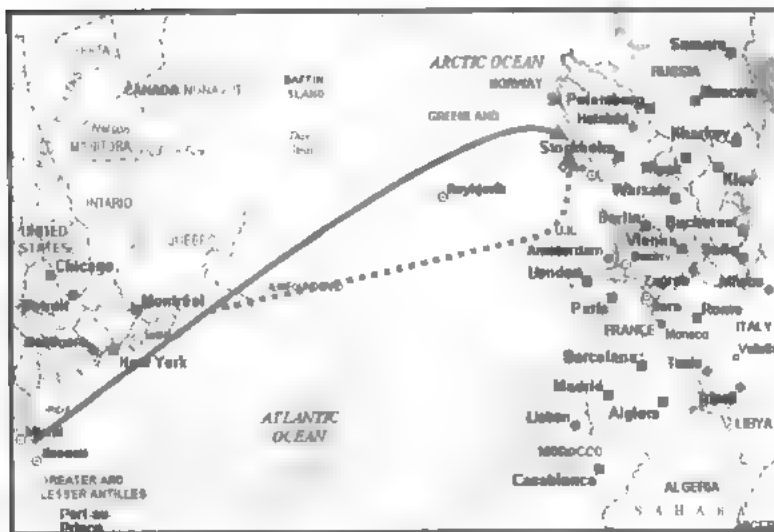
Map 5



### Map 6: Italian Military Strategy



### Map 7: Maritime Strategy







### *CHAPTER - III*

## **ALLIED AIMS, GOALS AND STRATEGIES**

The story of allied strategy in World War - II is the search for common denominators among three sovereign powers drawn together in a grand alliance by a common bond of danger. Since beginning, the inner web of the Grand Alliance was the close relationship between the United States and Great Britain. Soviet Union was a shifting partner in the Second World War. Once Germany invaded Soviet Union, it changed sides, and joined the Allies. The Soviet Union's part in developing and directing the combined strategy of war was to be relatively small, compared with the worldwide demands facing the United States and Great Britain, its strategic problem was simple, consisting of war on only one front at a time; it did not enter the conflict with Japan until the closing days of World War - II. The Russians took formal part in strategic decisions only at international conferences. Procedure adopted for the formulation of strategy was:-

- The basic procedures for formulating Allied strategy emerged in 1941-42. Britain and the United States joined to establish the Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS), the agency for hemming out Allied strategy and for day-to-day conduct of the war. The CCS was a unique organization in coalition machinery. Decisions were arrived at by common agreement; no votes were taken. The leaders

concerted policies and plans, outlined strategies, discussed timing of operations, approved programs of allocations, and measured requirements against resources. Their decisions were, of course, subject to the approval of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill.

- The Prime Minister and the President, who were over and above the CCS system were responsible for all decisions. Each wore two hats, one political and the other military. As political leaders, they sometimes had more in common with each other than with their respective staffs.
- The full-dress Anglo-American conferences usually came about when planning had reached a point where top level decisions on important matters of Allied strategy and policy were necessary. The conferences and the CCS system provided the framework for the important decisions in European and Asian strategy; frequent conferences were held and major decisions were taken, which in due course guided the conduct of war. The fateful decision of unconditional surrender was taken at Casablanca in 1943.

### **Great Britain Strategy**

British foreign policy has always been to maintain the balance of power - that is to keep the greater Continental nations divided through rivalry and to hold the balance between them. This balance automatically fixed who the potential enemy was. Based on this principle, their aim in past wars was not to annihilate their enemy because annihilation would permanently have upset the balance. British Island is the centre of a system of sea communications which encircle the coastline of Europe from the White Sea to the Aegean. Her political aim being

to maintain balance of power in the European Continent, in accordance with the traditional British policy. Therefore, in the event of war, her fleet could support whichever power her policy of balancing favoured, directly or indirectly (**Map-7**). In this backdrop, historically, the best fitted strategy for Great Britain remained defensive-offensive order. Defensive as long as command of the sea is held, being herself secure from attack; offensive, once command guarantees freedom of movement towards or against any maritime objective with the strategic field. In all wars fought, according to British traditional policy, this defensive-offensive strategy has proved that it does not matter how powerful a Continental nation is, or how extensive are its conquests, for as long as Britain rules the waves the initiative remains in her hands.

In March 1939 Great Britain guaranteed of her support to Poland; it happened as Britain was incapable of influencing events in her own interest. To make any sense of this guarantee, Britain turned toward Russia, but Stalin decided alliance with Germany. Stalin went into an alliance with Hitler, not because he loved National Socialism, but because he feared it, and because Britain had surrendered her initiative to Poland. He knew for certain that this surrender would lead to a war, a war in which the Western World might easily destroy itself. In September 1939 Great Britain and her ally France slid into war on no strategic basis whatsoever and the initiative passed on to Germany. Britain was found well short of her preparations at the advent of war. Her best divisions constituting the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) were sent to France. These divisions narrowly averted a complete disaster by evacuating through the French port of Dunkirk. The other regular divisions were spread in the colonies and could not be brought back home in time.

Even after getting these divisions back, Great Britain could not hope to match the combined military might of Germany and Italy.

### **National Strategy vis-à-vis War Policy**

The war aim of Britain sprang directly from its foreign policy of maintaining Continental Balance of Power. Churchill declared the war aim as 'Victory at all costs'. British war policy was based on the following: -

- The security of the United Kingdom and Imperial possessions and interests.
- Command of the home waters and the eastern Mediterranean, while seeking to regain command of the entire Mediterranean.
- Intensified air offense and economic pressures against both Germany and Italy.
- Development of resources for major offensive ground operations when opportunity offered.

Because of the policy of the '*Continental Balance of Power*', what Liddell Hart called "*The Indirect Approach*", the 'Grand Design' was to keep the greater continental nations divided through rivalry and to hold the balance between them mainly through use of its economic resources and navy. Main contours of political strategy were: Mobilization of population for homeland's defence; support resistance and favourable regimes in Europe; endeavour to get the US involved in the war directly or indirectly; and to assist and encourage Russia to wane Germany.

British military aim turned to be a total defeat of Germany, thus elimination of Hitler and Nazism. Thus it devised a military strategy, based on a bi-pronged broader

spectrum. First priority was reconstitution of BEF. After that, efforts were devoted to the defence of the Island—first, by reforming and re-equipping the Regular Army, and that by fortifying the likely landing-places through arming and organizing the population so far as was possible and of course by bringing home whatever forces could be gathered from the Empire. Then as a strategy to defeat Hitler, it was decided to hit Germany around the edges of the continent and gradually weaken it. As part of this manoeuvre, Britain decided to support occupied countries by subversion against Germany. An intensified air offensive against vital economic and industrial targets was also planned, eventually as a critical strike at the heart of Germany.

The British were convinced that without US involvement they could not defeat Hitler. In the aftermath of World War - I, United States had drawn itself into isolation and adopted 'Neutrality Laws'. Now a favourable public opinion had to be created in US to seek its involvement in the war. Britain's ability to survive in 1940 was extremely important to buy time for US to create favourable public opinion in support of war. Great Britain did manage to have material support from United States through hard cash and subsequently through Lend Lease Act. In November 1940 Admiral Stark from United States submitted "Plan Dog", based on which American Policy was to be formulated. The central point of Admiral Stark's analysis was the recognition that American security depended, to a very large extent on the fate of Great Britain. After knowing about Opinion of Admiral Stark, Churchill remarked "the plan is strategically sound and highly adapted to our interests". He was 'much encouraged' by the American naval view and cautioned his staff to strengthen this policy and not to use an argument inconsistent with it.

After the fall of France, Great Britain wanted to involve Russia in the war to open the second front. The Soviet Government was unwilling to make any alliance with Great Britain, which might provoke Hitler. The day Germany attacked Russia Churchill made a broadcast, offering assistance of Great Britain. Initially there was no response but later the Russians requested the British Government to send military mission. The entry of Russia into war was a welcome relief for Great Britain. The German air attack diverted to Russia and the threat of an invasion diminished. On July 12, 1941 an agreement was signed between Great Britain and Russia for provision of war assistance and support of all kinds and not to conclude during the war an armistice or treaty of peace except by mutual agreement. Stalin demanded of Great Britain to open a second front either in France or the Arctic to draw away some 30 to 40 German divisions from the Russian front and thus relieve some pressure off the Russian armies.

During Stalin's dictatorship two very important aspects of the communist doctrine had emerged. The first was that the Soviet Union, as the foremost communist state and bastion of the movement, was to be kept strong and intact. For this reason a conflict with any power strong enough to endanger the Soviet regime was to be avoided. In March 1939, Stalin spoke out clearly and unequivocally when he confirmed that at all costs he was not going to involve USSR in war for the benefit of others. The second aspect was the confirmation of expansionist aims by subversion and the spread of communism.

After the rise of Hitler in Germany, Stalin did propose the idea of collective security of Europe, however, appeasement of Hitler by British and French leaders at Munich conveyed to Stalin the desire of western

democracies to keep Russia out of Europe. He suspected that France and Britain were not objecting to German militarism and expansion because they hoped to turn its momentum against Russia. This forced Stalin to move in the opposite direction and he started the policy of rapprochement with Germany. However, even after signing Non Aggression Pact with Germany in 1939, he knew that at some point of time or other Soviet Union would have to fight Germany; that in fact the main purpose of his patience was to get the protection of buffer zones in the West, and time to build up Soviet forces. Pact protocol and agreement were highly satisfactory to the Kremlin which, at the cost of a little ink, gained the predominantly White Russian and Ukrainian regions of Poland, and an imprecisely defined free hand in the Baltic and the Balkans. But it is certain that at that time neither he nor his colleagues had anticipated swift and decisive German victory over France in June 1940 and the looming danger that the British Commonwealth would also founder. Stalin did not foresee that within a year Germany would be in a position to turn against Russia. On 13 April 1941 Stalin signed a pact of neutrality with Japan, which freed Russia from the danger of a war on two fronts. Soviet Union did much to keep Hitler well disposed; they tried hard to please him and favoured Nazi war effort; but Germany did not live up to its part of the bargain and attacked Russia on 22 June 1941.

**Russian Strategies and Aims/Objectives.** German invasion of Russia compelled far reaching changes in Soviet political strategy. In July 1941, Great Britain and Russia signed a treaty of mutual assistance and agreed not to conclude a separate peace. Stalin asked Great Britain to open another front in the West (in Northern France) or in the North (the Arctic), for easing German pressure

against Russia. Stalin managed vital supplies of weapons and equipment from Allies and still afforded to conserve his ideology till end of the war. He kept his expansionist designs in sight and proposed that after the war Germany should be split into a number of small independent states. Russian political aims/objectives turned out to be: -

- To defend Russia against German invasion.
- After having survived the initial reverses, the Soviet Union strived for domination of Eastern Europe to bring it under her sphere of influence.
- After victories against Germany, revival of the age-old aim of spreading communism in the captured territories of Eastern Europe.

Soviet military strategy can be past tracked since Civil War of 1918-20. The Bolshevik victory in the civil war 1918-20 vindicated Lenin's emphasis on economic and political factors. The victory stemmed in large part from the centralized control of Red Army, possession of key political centres, control of the Czarist war industries, and the support of much of the industrial work force. The expansion of the workers' and peasants' Red Army from an all-volunteer force of 300,000 into a conscript army of 5.5 million posed vexing problems of reliability and control. These were addressed by introduction of political commissars, empowered to countersign and, if necessary, countermand the orders of commanders.

It was during the immediate post-war years that many of the most important theoretical advances were made. In these years, Mikhail V. Frunze, the dominant figure in the Red Army after Leon Trotsky's eclipse, waged a successful campaign for the establishment of a "unified military doctrine" for the Red Army, in striking contrast to the condition that prevailed during the civil war.



Training, equipment, and tactical drills were standardized, operational experience methodically analyzed, and the latest technology integrated into the forces. The creation of this doctrinal framework coincided with a period of intense, though secret, collaboration with the Germans (1922-33). Both military establishments understood and made every effort to exploit the revolutionary improvements that tanks and aircraft would offer for enhancing surprise, mobility, firepower, and operation in depth.

In 1936, 'Operation in Depth' was codified in Soviet Field Services Regulations. It firmly placed the emphasis on surprise, shock, and deep offensive thrusts of armour and aviation into the heart of the enemy's territory with a view to bringing about his collapse in the shortest possible time. Although enriched by German concepts, 'Deep Operations' was largely the brainchild of M. V. Tukhachevsky, who by then had devised operational concepts designed to split, outflank, and encircle large concentrations of enemy forces. As Stalin's first and second Five - Year plans (1929-33 and 1934-38) gathered pace, advanced weapons were made available, pioneering experiments were conducted, and the first mass armoured formations were formed.

The doctrine of Deep Operations was implemented to striking effect by General G. K. Zhukov against the Japanese Kwantung Army in the battle of Khalkin - Gol / Nomonhan in August 1939. This battle not only provided convincing demonstration of the effect of deep penetration by massed tanks, it also demonstrated firm political direction. The Soviet Far Eastern Army provided a paradigm that crushing counter offensive action could combine with a defensive strategy and a clearly defensive political purpose. However, the effect of the purges (1937-

39) on these developments was as extensive as it was deep. These purges cut short the process of development of Soviet strategy and threw Soviet military thought into chaos. Elaboration of the principles of operations in depth, associated with Tukhachevsky and other liquidated commanders stopped immediately and Voroshilov and the proponents of positional warfare, a strategy dependent on defensive fortification, began to reformulate strategy. Operating under these uncertain environments, the Soviets were caught between preparation for the war of manoeuvre and the war of position, and were not ready for either, as the Winter War against Finland took place in 1939-40. The experiences of Finnish War led the Red Army command to make some changes in organization and training. However, the time available to finish the reorganization of Red Army was not sufficient.

The historical evolution of Soviet military strategy led to a significant aim which dominated the Country's strategy in World War – II, total defeat of Germany, amounting to unconditional surrender (**Map-8**). When analysed, it appears that Soviet military doctrine always preferred the principle of offensive action as the only means by which total destruction of the enemy could be accomplished. However, this concept was strongly opposed by former imperial officers, who were of the opinion that next war would be of attrition, in which total victory could not be achieved rapidly and the war would be long and protracted. Therefore, in 1941 Russian army was more focused on placing greater premium on the fortification of forces, masses and firepower more than mobility. Russians paid heavy price for this outdated concept in the initial phases of German onslaught. Soviet strategy at the same time acknowledged defence to be fully legitimate. It was believed to be a temporary phase

conducted within the framework of strategic attack in selected directions and not on the entire front. Taking advantage of the communication centres, dominating few primitive roads, these were converted to fortresses of defence, necessitating their clearance by the invading army through a disproportionate investment of effort. Lenin opined that victory is impossible unless one has learned how to retreat properly. He emphasized that aim in strategy is not only to win battles but also to gain time wherein to accumulate forces which can win them. Russians violated this principle initially and for stubborn fighting in 1941, paid a heavy price, when they were penetrated, encircled and destroyed. Later they learnt to retreat with continuous front using depth afforded by terrain. This elastic defence strategy along with "*Scorched Earth Policy*" was highly rewarding.

Soviet military strategy guided by the dictum of Lenin, "In war the victory belongs to him who has the most reserves, the greatest sources of strength and the greatest fortitude of the popular masses," devoted special attention to the development of strategic reserves. However, at the initial stages of the war inadequate reserves of weapons and equipments caused problems in mobilization of the armed forces. Then Russia gave more importance to land forces. Air Force was meant primarily to support ground forces. Navy was designed to cooperate with ground forces in coastal areas.

One of the most important factors determining the development of military strategy after German invasion was high combat morale of Red Army in general and masses in particular; managed by the Soviet Government through inculcation of sense of nationalism, by declaring the war as patriotic war and correctly determining the political and military aims of war against Germany. Russia

had inexhaustible capacity of recreating reserves by mobilization of its people. The massive Soviet mobilization system succeeded in getting under way well out of the reach of the German Armies and from the winter of 1941 onwards, the Germans were always out-numbered by Russians. This was coupled with the fact that Russia had intensified its military production phenomenally, producing to meet the requirement of Red Army. The problem of strategic utilization of the branches of the armed forces was also successfully solved during the war. Soviet military strategy, starting from the fundamental position that victory in war can be achieved only by the combined efforts of all the branches of the armed forces. Therefore, reorganization of each branch, i.e. Infantry, Artillery, Air Defence, Navy and Air Force was carried out in accordance with the growth of military and economic potential, the development of science and technology, and the changing tasks of the armed forces. During the war, Soviet offensive doctrine envisaged alternating series of strikes at different points, each temporarily suspended when its impetus waned in face of stiffening resistance, each so aimed as to pave the way for the next and all timed to react to one another. It led Germans to rush reserves to the points that were struck while simultaneously restricting their power to move reserves in time to the points that were going to be struck next. It paralyzed German freedom of action while progressively draining their balance of reserves. In determining the aims of strategic operations and their directions, Soviet supreme command always took into account not only the requirement of the strategy but also those of policy and economics.

At the initial stages of the war, the Soviets resorted to trade space for time, bringing about a protracted war

by compelling the Germans to punch deep into Soviet territory without obtaining a decision. Territory lost to the enemy was to be made virtually useless by "Scorched Earth Policy" and rendered insecure by incessant guerrilla warfare. The transition to strategic defence was realized during the war and among the most important problems of strategic defence solved by Soviet military strategy were to determine the direction of the main attack of the enemy; to establish a strategic defence and methods for the restoration of the strategic front; to conduct the defence and the utilization of strategic reserves appropriately; and to create conditions for a counter offensive. Stalin's decision of postponing full mobilization of the strategic reserves and their early employment paid off. He was able to lure the depleted enemy into the vastness of Russia, before committing his reserves to an all out offensive.

### **Strategy of the United States**

Decision made before American entry into World War - II, in the context of a world threatened by Axis aggression in Europe and Asia, the judgment that Germany must be defeated first, stands as the most important single strategic concept of the war. The decision was finally crystallized by the war plan known as RAINBOW 5, the plan put into effect when the Japanese struck at Pearl Harbor in December 1941. Formulation process of American strategy is discussed in subsequent paragraphs; which ultimately leads to identify their political and military aims and objective.

U.S Strategic thought in the years from 1919 to 1938 was largely concentrated on the problems presented by a conflict arising out of Japanese aggression against American interests or territory in the Far East; called

Plan ORANGE. Other contingencies were the war with Great Britain alone Plan (RED) or with Great Britain and Japan together Plan (RED - ORANGE). In April 1939 world situation was reviewed by US Authorities. So comprehensive was the report that it was characterized as a model of strategic analysis "a monument" and became the basis for much of strategic planning before pearl Harbour to arrive at sound Military Strategy for US, report concluded that Germany and Italy would take overt action in the western Hemisphere only if Great Britain and France remained neutral or were defeated. Japan would continue to expand into China and Southeast Asia at the expense of Great Britain and United States, by peaceful means if possible but by force if necessary. The three Axis power would act together whenever the international situation seemed favourable. If other countries including the United States reacted promptly and vigorously to such action, then general war might well follow.

In June 1939, five specific situations forming the basis of the five RAINBOW plans were defined by the Joint Board. The objective of all was same - to defend the United States and the Western Hemisphere from Axis aggression and penetration, overt or concealed. Germany's startling success in Europe precipitated review of strategy. Still in doubt was the fate of Great Britain and the French Navy, and American policy depended to a very large degree on these two unknowns. Possession of the British and French Fleets would give the European Axis naval equality with the U.S. Fleet and make hostile operations in the Western Hemisphere possible within six months. Since six months was the time required to mobilize, equip, and train American forces, the planners asserted, "the date of the loss of the British or French Fleets automatically sets the date of our mobilization". Events in Europe after June 1940, gave hope for a brighter future than had seemed

possible after the German offensives in April and May. The success of the British in beating off the attacks of the Luftwaffe led to a more favourable program of support for the British war efforts.

In November 1940, Admiral Stark made the first bid for a firm and clear statement of American policy known as the "Plan Dog" memorandum because the recommended course of action if the United States became a belligerent was contained in paragraph D ("Dog" in military parlance). Admiral Stark's study constitutes perhaps the most important single document in the development of World War - II strategy. The central point of Admiral Stark's analysis was the recognition that American security depended to a very large extent on the fate of Great Britain. Therefore, Britain ought to be assisted in every possible way. This note he sounded at the very outset with the assertion that "if Britain wins decisively against Germany we could win everywhere; but that if she loses the problems confronting us would be very great; and while we might not lose everywhere, we might, possibly not win anywhere". In facing the consequences of close co-operation with the British, Admiral Stark boldly raised the possibility so far avoided of active American participation in the war. Since British could not themselves defeat Germany, the question was how American resources in men and supplies could be employed in combination with the British to achieve this end. The only certain way of defeating Germany was "by military success on shore", and for that, bases close to the European continent would be required. "I believe", Stark declared, "the United States, in addition to sending naval assistance, would also need to send large air and land forces to Europe or Africa, or both and to participate strongly in this land offensive". Considering

the importance of the Atlantic to American security, Stark argued strongly against major commitments in the far Pacific. Such a course would have the effect of drawing resources away from the Atlantic and cutting down aid to Britain. Stark viewed the four possibilities and he stated them as questions: Shall our principal military effort be directed toward hemisphere defence and security in both oceans? Shall we be prepared for a full offensive against Japan, premised on assistance from the British and Dutch forces the Far East, and remain on the strict defensive in the Atlantic? Shall we plan for sending the strongest possible military assistance both to the British in Europe and to the British, Dutch, and Chinese in the Far East? Shall we direct our efforts toward an eventual strong offensive in the Atlantic as an ally of the British, and a defence in the Pacific?

Admiral Stark further went to state his recommended option. Until forced to enter the war, the United States should follow the course A; if forced into war with Japan, then United States should adopt Course D. Accepted informally by Roosevelt, and it became the basis for further US planning. Meetings with Britain were held at Washington and it was decided that the United States would make the main effort in Atlantic and European area, where major enemy Germany was located. In the Pacific and Far East U.S strategy would be defensive.

US national strategy was to prevent Axis penetration in the Western Hemisphere along with mobilization of American people and war industry to aid directly or indirectly the countries in conflict with Axis powers. United States policy was influenced by Roosevelt's conviction to sustain Great Britain against Germany. It aimed to secure American economic interests, commensurating with her



growth as a world power and, without direct political involvement in Europe, to ensure survival of British Empire - maintaining freedom of the seas (her vital national interest). Its political objectives turned out to:-

- Protect sea trade routes through control of the Pacific by US Navy and the Atlantic by the British Navy.
- Contain Japanese expansion by defensive means and deal with Germany first, employing offensive military power.
- Develop nuclear arsenal for ultimate deterrence.

**US Military Strategy.** The Country's military strategy was based on the military aim to defeat Axis powers in collaboration with the Allied powers to achieve unconditional surrender. Strategy of the offensive against Germany and its allies in 1941 was set forth in RAINBOW-5. Rainbow-5 was identical with ABC-1. As a matter of fact, one of the first assumptions of the plan was that Allies would conduct the war in accord with ABC-1. For the US Army, primary immediate effort would be to build up large land and air forces; for major offensive operations against the Axis Power and other operations were to be restricted to those that would not materially delay this effort. RAINBOW-5 was neither a blue print for victory nor a plan of operation. It merely outlined the objectives and mission of American forces in case of war on the basis of assumption that seemed sound at the time. The vital facet of American strategy was the programme evolved during 1940 of aiding other nations fighting against Axis Power. This agreement was named as Lend Lease agreement. The principal recipient remained Great Britain; subsequently it was extended to China and Soviet Union in November 1941. An appraisal of long

term strategy was conducted during 1941, in which estimates were made on the size and composition of the forces required for defeating Germany, to implement and support RAINBOW Plan. After Pearl Harbour, the Victory Programme with mutual agreement was expanded. A plan was prepared for complete economic mobilization for state controlled war economy of USA. In January 1942 new targets were set to double the numbers of principal weapons.

### **Grand Strategy of Allies**

First and major object of Anglo-American grand strategy was defeat of Germany and in the meantime the Japanese should be contained until the Allies could assemble enough strength to take the offensive in the Pacific. Political expediency combined with geography and logistics in arriving at this decision is perhaps the single most important one made by the British and U. S. in World War - II. In general the Allied strategy represents three distinct phases. 1st Phase is formative era from 1941-42, 2nd Phase covering the mid-war period down to the landing in Normandy, was the offensive phase of the coalition war. Third Phase is pursuit of victory. Grand strategy framed by British and American Chiefs of Staff was as under:-

- Germany was the predominant member of Axis powers, and, consequently the Atlantic and European area was considered to be the decisive theatre.
- Germany is the prime enemy and her defeat is the key to victory. Once Germany is defeated, the collapse of Italy and the defeat of Japan must follow.

- Cardinal principle of American and British strategy should be: only the minimum of force necessary for the safeguarding of vital interests in other theatre should be diverted from operation against Germany.
- Use of nuclear bomb on Japan was also part of Grand Design. It was primarily meant to deter Soviet expansion designs towards its East, which worked very well.

Essential features of Grand Strategy emerged to be security of the main areas of war industry, maintenance of essential communications; closing and tightening the ring round Germany, wearing down and undermining German resistance by air bombardment, blockade, subversive activities and propaganda; the continuous development of offensive actions against Germany; and maintaining only such position in the Eastern theatre as would safeguard vital interests and deny to Japan access to raw materials vital to her continuous war effort while concentrating on the defeat of Germany.

Allied Military Strategy was predominately based on divergent approaches. Though Allied military aim was the total defeat of Germany and Japan, practically amounting to unconditional surrender yet such approaches of the Allies were clearly reflected in the conflict between U.S. and British strategy against Germany. The 1941 - 42 period saw the emergence of what may be called the peripheral theory, espoused by Churchill and the British staff, and the theory of mass and concentration, advocated by General Marshall and his staff. The divergent approaches lay behind the debate in 1942 over the notion of an early cross Channel attack versus the invasion of North Africa

Operation Torch. However British prevailed, November 1942 saw the start of Mediterranean operations. The

British stood for hitting the German Army at the edges of the Continent. In the peripheral concept, emphasis would be on swift campaigns of speed and manoeuvre, on probing soft spots, on a war of attrition. The cross-Channel operation would follow as a last blow against a Germany already in process of collapse. The British concept was in accord with its small-scale economy and limited manpower, and its experience of heavy losses in World War - I. The United States advocated for concentration at the decisive point to defeat the main body of the enemy. This view reflected U.S optimism, reliance on the industrial machine to produce the necessary wherewithal, and military faith in a large army built and trained for offensive purposes. Stalin put Soviet weight squarely behind US concept of strategy. He also promised in turn to launch an all out offensive on the eastern front. Stalin's stand put the capstone on Anglo-American European strategy and in a sense fixed western strategy. Germany was to be crushed by a great pincers by the Anglo - American drive on the west and a Soviet drive from the east.

Allied grand strategy can best be understood vis-à-vis conduct of the War. The period 1941-42 was mostly spent in formation of alliances and was period of defensive strategy. Frequent conferences were held and major decisions taken included establishment of CCS. The system established after Pearl Harbour became the hallmark of subsequent Allied operations. It provided the higher direction of war, particularly when Axis had no comparable system. An offensive against the mainland Europe in 1942 was not considered feasible while Britain prevailed over US in favour of Operation TORCH, which aimed at capturing North African coast and defeat of Italy prior to launching major offensive against Germany on mainland Europe. During mid war periods the initiative had

passed from Axis to the Allies and Operation TORCH had opened a debate which continued till summers of 1944. During this phase Germany was subjected to "Strategic Bombing" with an aim to cripple her war production. The "United Nations Pact" was signed between countries at war against Axis in January 1942 for mutual assistance and not to sign separate peace agreements. The decision of "unconditional surrender" by Germany was proclaimed and controversy regarding Cross-Channel invasion was eventually resolved in "Casablanca Conference" in January 1943. The war changed the political map of the world **(Map-9)**. The Europe was divided in Eastern and Western parts. Germany was divided into four zones and Japan occupied by USA till peace treaty in 1952. USA and USSR emerged as super powers with divergent ideologies giving rise to the Cold War. Communism gained hold in China and Eastern Europe. The world saw nuclear holocaust and entered in the nuclear age. The era of colonization came to an end.

## *CHAPTER - IV*

### **ANALYSIS**

Analysis of Axis' and Allied political aims, military objectives and strategies to attain these, are of immense value as these point to the interesting interplay of ends, ways and means trinity and how these ultimately led to the failure as well as success. The casualties increased in this war primarily because of technological advancements and use of air/nuclear arsenal on the urban areas.

#### **Political Aims and Objectives**

One of the key factors leading to Allies victory was their unified political objectives against Germany and her allies which allowed the military strategy to follow clear objectives. On the contrary, Axis political aims and objectives were more of a marriage of convenience and could not achieve unified effects against any of the key opponents, rather they had different national interests. While Germany wanted to destroy "Clay-made Russia" this was not directly supported by Italy and Japan and they did not set their military objectives in line with this German political aim. Japanese invasion of British colonies in Asia overstretched her maritime power and attack on Pearl Harbour did not serve long term interests of Axis. Thus the importance of unity of conception was even at the level of alliances. To be viable and sustainable, national strategy must take into account the national constraints and strategic imperatives. The study panel's

analysis of adopted political aims and their outcome in European theatre in this backdrop are numerous.

German political aims lacked prudence. Non-Aggression Pact with Russia gave required political and strategic space to Germany to focus elsewhere. But later German policy against Russia and targeting of US – bound shipping led to US declaration of war against Germany. Without US support Allies were not in a position to counter German incursions in Europe. Thus German policy was not viable at grand strategic plane and there was serious lack of concord between political aims and military strategy. Germany's national strategy should have kept the US out of war. USA's policy of initial non – involvement remained successful as she benefited the most from World War - II. It was able to keep the war confined to Pacific, Asia, Africa and Europe. American heartland remained naturally immune to direct impact of war; however it entered war on sound national strategy plane of protecting its vital economic interests in Europe with Britain, its "Natural Ally". Great Britain's policy swayed between the policies of Hitler's appeasement to unconditional surrender. This policy arguably prolonged the war. However, Britain policy of inviting US involvement was viable allowing Allies to gain political objectives. French political aim was initially to counter balance Germany. On military strategic plane, it did "too late and too little" to accomplish that political objective. Its subsequent political aim was to restore its territorial integrity which was made possible due to coalition with Great Britain and USA. Both aims, therefore, were flawed as neither the developmental strategy nor the political framework could ensure its manifestation. Italy without having formulated well defined national policy and objectives followed the suit and course adopted by Germany and ultimately surrendered without achieving anything.

## German Strategy

German strategy was based on certain strategic assumptions. Hitler's misperception about the environment and the threat made him commit crucial mistakes, which resulted in the eventual defeat of Germany. As regards to Britain, Hitler thought that the British would not declare war on the Poland issue and would eventually seek peace with Germany for a common fight against the Russians. Hitler also anticipated that with the fall of France, the British government would see the reason to give in one way or the other. Hitler visualized that USA was not superior to the Japanese in sea-power and will not intervene in Europe in early time frame but then, he himself declared war on USA in December 1941, which can be described as his greatest folly. By adding USA to his overt enemies, at a time when Germany was fighting both Great Britain and Russia, Hitler sealed his fate. Further Hitler believed that if a country, as small as Finland, could accomplish initial success against Russians, Germans could defeat Russian armies within a matter of weeks.

It is well understood that strategy at any level is a correlation of ends, ways and means. This notion demanded Germany to avoid a war on two fronts and keep USA out of war. German invasion of Russia allowed Russia, USA and Great Britain to ally against Germany. German political aim was far beyond means available thus led to the strategic stretch. As Hitler's Reich Minister for War, while comparing German war-industrial potentials with Russia, acknowledged, "this war was not winnable purely because of material factors". Germany's military and industrial resources adequately supported her political and military objectives up to conquest of France but not beyond 1941. Faulty strategy of Alliances was also evident. Hitler clearly understood importance of alliances



to achieve his objectives. However, German alliances proved beneficial in short term only, whereas in long term, Germany had to support them dissipating her own resources and unnecessary delays like sending troops to North Africa and Greece for assistance of Italian forces. Besides, breaking away alliance with Russia also proved fatal. Further to it, the war highlighted the difficulties of waging coalition warfare. Germany and Japan were nominal alliance partners. They largely operated independently of each other and achieved some notable successes during war's initial campaigns. The inability of the Axis powers to set common strategic priorities seriously hurt their chances of winning. In short, Hitler's declaration of war on the United States in December 1941 can be described as one of his greatest follies. US entry in the war against Germany paved the way for her defeat.

Based on the theory of high speed mechanized warfare, the significant dictates of German military strategy were to avoid a two front war through short and swift Blitzkrieg by adopting strategy of annihilation. Notwithstanding the selection of political aim, correct military aim was derived, i.e. domination of Europe. However, the attainability of this military aim was not within the existing resources of Germany. Then, Hitler frequently changed his military objective which not only led to burdening war economy but also wasted crucial time. For instance change of mind against pushing for Moscow proved fatal in Russia, invasion of Balkans and not sealing the British withdrawal from Dunkirk - to name a few. By establishing High Command of the Armed Forces (OKW), Hitler controlled both political and military spheres of decision making. It was through this machinery and chain of command that Hitler controlled the German military strategy throughout the war. Hitler stated, "I do not expect my generals to

understand me, but I shall expect them to obey my orders”.

Germans demonstrated a great acumen for surprise and stratagem. A true example is invasion of France wherein, French mindset was fixated on positional warfare and expected German attack from Belgium. However, Germans based their plan exploiting French perception about Ardennes, launching their main effort in this sector for a central rupture and using armour in mass and substituting artillery with stuka bombers. With the invent of Blitzkrieg and conduct of operations with high speed and strong air support, Germans displayed classical strategy of dislocation by causing complete paralysis of the Polish forces in 1939 and French Army in 1940. After the occupation of Poland, Norway, Low Countries and France, Hitler could still have concluded the war on a successful note but faulty war termination strategy involved his attention towards Russia, where he started suffering increasingly with the consequences of strategic overstretch. He, as a matter of fact could not implement war termination strategy and should have also conceived alternative war termination strategy.

Hitler's problem vis-à-vis Russia was one of time. He had to defeat her and establish his *lebensraum* before United States intervened in the war. If not, then the western front would once again become active and Germany could be caught between two fronts. Hitler failed to either defeat Russia or extricate his forces on the entry of United States into war. He had to fight simultaneously on two fronts and resultantly his resources were dissipated. Two fronts war became his nemesis. Hitler listened to and implemented new ideas on warfare put forward by Guderan, Von Manstien, Rommel, Model and Skorzeny. He sidelined the old "Prussian school of thought" officers.

However he committed few strategic blunders like not annihilating British forces at Dunkirk, Russian Campaign, declaring war on USA, over reliance on air force, all this led to his eventual defeat.

**Principal Notions of Operational Strategy.** Hitler's key failure was in identification and neutralization of enemies' centre of gravity which is a prime notion of operational strategy. Hitler failed to effectively counter centre of gravity of his adversaries. He acknowledged the value of Moscow as Russian centre of gravity, but deviated from it once it was within the reach of German forces. He correctly identified Paris as French centre of gravity. But, while he analysed Britain centre of gravity in its "public morale", he could not effectively neutralize it - notwithstanding the fact that Britain's centre of gravity was Royal Air Force.

After the occupation of Poland, Norway and France, Hitler was still in a state of balance and could have concluded the war on a favourable note. However, with opening front with Russia, she suffered from irreversible strategic overstretch. Besides, while German land and air forces were strong, she was weak in sea power that eventually led to strategic imbalance in long and total war. German campaign in Norway left to German Navy with only one operational war ship. In crucial Battle of Britain, German air, Luftwaffe, concentrated on Great Britain cities which spared Royal Air Force Bases and radar sites. This tipped balance in favour of Royal Air Force in due course. Germans were carried away by the swift victories in Poland and France, where the space for swift war, the Blitzkrieg technique was suitable. German military command did not appreciate the vast and mass of Russia where once the Blitzkrieg got kick start; it eventually led to dilution in spaces. The losses in men and

material surpassed German assessment which gradually led to culmination point. This single most important factor led to German defeat in Russia. Moreover, the Germans followed the theory of manoeuvre with passion but did not attach required importance to theory of battle.

### **Allied Strategy**

Overall due to conflicting ideologies between USA and UK at one end and the Russians at the other, the Allies initially could not arrive at a common political aim but later, the notion of defeat of Nazism united them. The aim of defeating Germany may have been all right for the duration of the war but it made no sense for the attainability of the result. This resulted in Stalin replacing Hitler and the iron curtain dividing Europe. After the Casablanca Conference, unconditional surrender was merged with the political aim of the Allies and became the overriding factor. This lengthened the war unnecessarily. After the defeat at Stalingrad, the opposition against Hitler was growing. He could have been overthrown but unconditional surrender was not acceptable to the German nation as it gave them no face saving outlet.

Some strategic misconceptions were prevailing on Allies' part, however. When Hitler occupied Czechoslovakia, Britain and France committed a blunder by offering guarantees to Poland. They should have first secured an assurance from Russia, the only power that could give effective support to Poland; whereas, Hitler, realizing the importance of Russia, made an alliance and thus, was able to neutralize Britain and France. The Allies failed to appreciate Hitler's aims. They acceded to numerous German aggressive measures like withdrawing from Treaty of Versailles, rearmament and remilitarization of Rhine Land till the invasion of Czechoslovakia. At time of

Allies decided to hit sources of energy and their means of distribution that brought strategic affects.

Russia was the only European Continental power, which emerged from the Second World War with all its political objectives attained. Nazism eliminated and Russia controlled Eastern Europe including East Germany. The reach of communism was now global. Stalin adroitly mounted his exterior manoeuvre to initially side with Germany, then joined the Allies and also concluded a pact with Japan to avoid a two front war which proved decisive in war against Germany. In the end he declared war on Japan and occupied its Northern islands virtually without resistance. Stalin infused nationalist sentiments to launch a so called "Patriotic War". The German mistake of maltreatment of civil population in occupied areas helped Stalin in this regard. Maltreatment of Russian public by German SS was one of the major blunders of Hitler's policy on Russia as it resulted in their unification instead of disintegration. After German invasion, Russian dispersal of war industry towards east helped them protect and conserve their war industry (approximately ten million population and thousands of Russian war enterprises were relocated to the eastern region of Russia).

The Soviets correctly assessed the utilization of their vast area to draw in the Germans. They thus involved the German force in a war of attrition. The German offensive was stretched, over extended then destroyed by well-coordinated counter strokes and encirclements e.g. Stalingrad and Kursk. The Soviets recognized the obtaining operational environment and took necessary measures to bring their strategy in concert. The German Blitzkrieg was defeated by never giving the opportunity for destruction of Russian forces. The defensive fronts were made flexible

to absorb the German onslaught and then launch counter strokes. Stalin took measures for a more efficient, mobile and professional armed forces, which thereby resulted in the defeat of the Germans in spite of massive setbacks to the Soviets in the initial stages of the war. Unlike Hitler, he did not dictate operational plans. He formed the Stavka a kind of general headquarters or a supreme planning staff. Stavka worked out strategy, allocated units to the various fronts and controlled the strategic reserves.

In World War – II, machine warfare, technological developments and adroit employment of these in the battle field proved decisive. Aircraft, submarine, tanks and nuclear weapons are few examples. Victory in World War – II went to the side with greater demographic potentials, defence – industrial base and balance force structure on land, air and sea. The war amply highlighted the importance of joint and combined operations, erasing lines amongst land, sea and air power. Victory eventually went to the side that could execute more effective combined and joint operations. World War – II also witnessed the efficacy of amphibious operations; Operation Overlord is an example. The War also saw the deterrence posed by the use of nuclear weapon. Arguably, if Japanese had known the impact of nuclear weapons, it would have deterred them from provoking United States.

### **Lessons Learnt**

World War – II highlights the importance of prudent cost benefit analysis of waging war. Europe the main theatre, learnt the value of peace through hard way. Since World War – II, Europe not only integrated as a single entity to ward off chances of war but also developed sound economies. It is not to suggest that nations must

go through total war to appreciate the benefits of peace but the assertion being made is that nations should undertake war only if it is beneficial or the last resort. Following lessons can be drawn:-

- The aim must be selected after careful consideration. It must be attainable and should take into account physical and metaphysical, internal and external factors. Once selected should be maintained and vigorously pursued throughout the war.
- War is contest for greater liberty of action on field, which to a greater degree is shaped by the strategic environment. Meaningful exterior manoeuvre is essential to shape the strategic environment for attainment of political and military aims. Success of exterior manoeuvre provides greater leverage and liberty to a nation to use military instrument of statecraft in pursuit of its national interests and objectives.
- Selection of objectives (ends) should be in consonance with the resources (means). Inadequacy of resources vis-à-vis objectives can lead to disaster.
- Over centralisation curtails the expertise and planning abilities of the command at all levels and curbs initiative. Hitler failed to learn this lesson of military history. All stake holders must be incorporated in formulation of policies and challenges being confronted.
- No country can win a war by only being on defensive or offensive. A carefully thought out posture in consonance with elements of national power and military wisdom be adopted. To win a war, a nation must have an offensive posture. Defensive posture of the Allies caused initial setbacks.

- Surprise has always played the decisive role in warfare. Whosoever achieves this, will gain victory. Germans' initial successes in Europe were mainly due to surprise and stratagem which they achieved by adopting new plans and doctrines.
- To fight a total war, all the services must have resources compatible to the war objectives. This deficit in any one service plays a vital role in the defeat. German neglect of naval power played a decisive role in the ultimate German defeat.
- World War - II amply highlights importance of naval and air power along with tri-services coordination. All the services must have resources and joint plan, compatible to the war objectives. It warrants special attention to be paid to services developmental strategy.
- Media provides or denies liberty of action of a nation in psychological domain. No nation going to war can afford to neglect the important aspects of information warfare, propaganda and psychological warfare.
- In war the role of intelligence is enhanced many times and also the need is felt to create new set ups in support of war efforts as done by USA and Britain. These set ups specially created for the war and are disbanded just after the war.
- Exit strategy should be given due importance while planning any operation. It helps in conservation of resources and war effort which can play a decisive role in later stages of battle. Policy framework must adequately cover aspect of exit strategy.



## **Important Events Before the War**

### **Germany**

- 1922 - "Rapplo Agreement" with USSR
- 1933 - Hitler took Germany out of the League of Nations
- 1935 - Hitler, unilaterally annulled the Treaty of Versailles
- 1935 - Agreement with Britain allowed Germany to bring up naval strength up to 35 %
- Hitler overcame economic crises by gearing up defence industry
- Hitler re-occupied Rhineland, occupied Austria, complete Czechoslovakia and threatened the Polish Corridor
- Concluded Anti Comintern Pact with Japan and a year later Italy also joined (Rome - Berlin - Tokyo Axis)
- Germany and USSR signed 10 years Pact of Non - Aggression on 23 August 1939

### **Italy**

- 1923 - Benito Mussolini came to power and annexed Ethiopia in 1936
- Helped the Spanish rebels with German materia support
- Seized Albania in 1939
- Agreed to fight on Germany side

### **Japan**

- Defined national security on terms of East Asian hegemony
- Seized Manchuria in 1931
- Began war against China in 1937
- Pearl Harbour and American bases in the Philippines threat to Japanese interests

**Great Britain**

- Policy of appeasement towards Germany between 1937 – 1939
- March 1939, announced to support Poland if invaded
- September 3, 1939, Britain declared war on Germany
- May 1940, Winston Churchill became Prime Minister

**France**

- In 1923, France occupied the Ruhr leading to financial ruin of Germany
- "The new Germany was brought into being by France herself: by French tyranny, by French violence, by French oppression" ....M Follick

**USSR**

- Formed "Communist International" (COMINTERN)
- Stalin had eyes fixed on Finland, Latvia, Estonia, Eastern Poland and Eastern Romania
- Secret Pact between Soviet Union and Germany in 1939, partitioning Poland
- September 1939, the Soviets invaded Eastern Poland and Finland

**USA**

- US Senate declined to ratify the Treaty of Versailles
- Remained inactive in League of Nations and withdrew into self - isolation
- 1929 - Great Depression slowed Europe's economic recovery
- US arbitration of "Sudetenland Crisis"
- Munich Pact in 1938 regarded as a failed act of appeasement
- Neutral in 1939, at the start of WW - II



Adolf Hitler (aged 35) after his release from prison Landesberg December 20, 1924 Hitler was accused of treason in 1923.



Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini greet each other at a meeting at the airport in Venice, June 14, 1934.



British Prime Minister Sir Neville Chamberlain on his return from Germany after talks with Hitler at London airport, September 24, 1938.



Churchill, Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin at the Tehran Conference, 28 November-1 December 1943.



Italian fascist leader Benito Mussolini (center) with the Fascist Party in Rome on October 28, 1922, after the March on Rome.



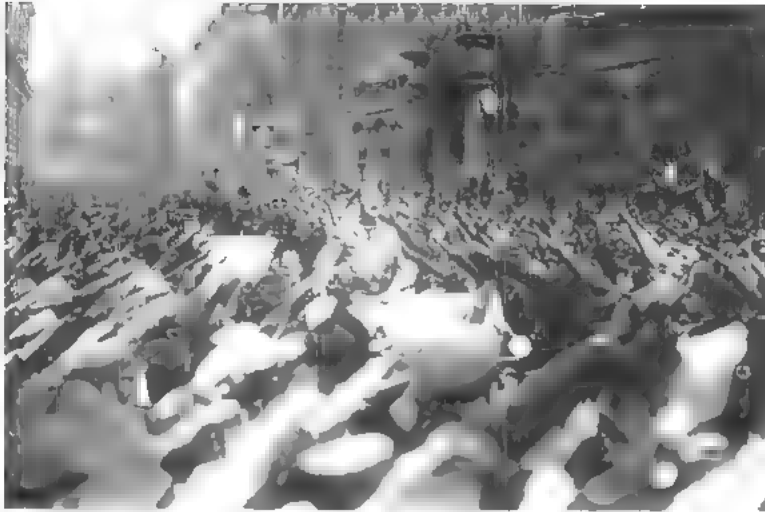
Joseph Stalin (second from right) at the signing of the Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov (seated), non-aggression pact with German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop (third from right)



The German army has demonstrated its power to miff on people during the harvest festival Byukeburge, near Hanover, Oct 4, 1935. In the picture dozens of tanks can be seen before event.



U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt promised grimly to preserve the neutrality of the country at any cost, on September 3, 1939



Adolf Hitler greeted in the streets of Munich, November 9, 1933 during the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the national-socialist movement.



The fall of Germany in World War II Soviet Red flag above the German Reichstag.

## ***Part Two***

### **POLAND AND FRANCE – 1940**

#### ***Study Panel***

Brig Asim Saleem Bajwa  
Lt Col Tariq Majid Arshad

(2008 – 2009)





## CHAPTER - I

### PRE-WAR ENVIRONMENT

*"To take a long circuitous route, after enticing the enemy out of the way, and though starting after him, to contrive to reach the goal before him. Such is the art of manoeuvring."*  
– Sun Tzu

Seeds of another war had been sown even before the previous was concluded, with signing of the ominous Treaty of Versailles. After the war, when President Wilson proposed his new concept of collective security, pleading that a lesson had been learnt on the futility of war, it was readily embraced to avoid war in future and the, "League of Nations" was established. It, however, proved to be a non starter, since after the war, even Washington, the proposer herself declined to pursue its establishment. Collectively the Allies of the World War - I were satisfied to have achieved their objectives of having reduced Germany to a military cipher and reinforced their agenda of clearing the way for furthering their model of democracy and capitalism. But the real peace was perhaps not a preference as reflected in the contents of the treaty: Germany was deprived of its offensive capability by reducing her armed forces of millions to 100,000 formed into seven divisions with no tanks, aircraft or artillery; Germany had to relinquish 28,000 square miles of its territory inhabited by 70 million Germans. French and Poland benefited the most as Alsace – Lorraine and coal rich Saar Basin were given to France. Province of Posen and Silesia were given to Poland.

After the war, the Americans withdrew to their shell of isolationism once again, the British also got back to their business of protecting their imperial possessions. Russians were too engrossed with fighting the Bolshevik revolution. French, who were entrusted with the onerous task of maintaining amity in the region and regulating the continental balance, were too content with their victory in the war that had just concluded. European economies, still recovering from the war were severely hit. Germany saw an unbearable inflation. For all gloom and deprivation, Germans blamed the loss of the more productive and resource rich areas to the beneficiaries of the Treaty. European powers were in disarray. Unemployment rose to astronomical scale in Europe, and the environment for mass scale recruitment by ideologues and revolutionaries became ideal. Hitler and Mussolini seized their moments and rode the waves. Fascism and National Socialism came to the fore and Hitler through the platform of his Nazi Party propounded Lebensraum, (his racist ideology of increasing living space for the German race across Europe). All Germans happily rallied against the Treaty of Versailles and contrived for a greater German Empire. Hitler's political interest was creation of a Greater German Empire by unifying all Germans and absorbing all resource rich regions in order to establish hegemony on the continent. To realize this objective Britain must be persuaded to accept her as a continental power instead of France. This meant destruction of France, elimination of Poland and a crusade against Bolshevism. Also USA must be kept from interfering in Europe.

### **Evolving Domestic and Exterior Developments**

Through these years simultaneous developments were taking place in two other distinct fields. Economic recovery topped Hitler's agenda, as he understood its

importance in realizing his political objectives. After the collapse of their economy in 1923, Doctor Schacht, an eminent German economist went around and raised huge donations to rebuild the German economy. While his focus was to harness the huge potential of human and natural resources to revive the industrial complexes, Hitler's adroit diplomacy managed raw material, energy and acquisition of latest technology for Germany. These economic reforms apart from correcting fundamentals of the economy, employed great human potential to be able to match the production of military wherewithal required for Hitler's expansionist designs. Von Seeckt, head of troop office, was busy salvaging the war ravaged German Army from the effects of Versailles since 1919 and laid the foundation of its revolutionary transformation. He remained mainly concerned with the force structure, training and procurement. His contention throughout was that the figure of 100,000 soldiers as imposed on them through the treaty, should be the best trained force to act as a skeleton and expand quickly when required. His emphasis, also, was on adopting a better way of fighting also. This he achieved with a secret collaboration with Russians. Luftwaffe was reorganized under the garb of their commercial airline Lufthansa. Training modules for flying and tank manoeuvres were run in the Lipetsk and Kazan areas. German officers were smuggled into Russia for aviation training. Seeckt's contribution in the field of training was best visible in the performance of the likes of Von Kleist, Von Rundstedt and Von Leeb during the execution of Blitzkrieg later during the war. So in retrospect, one can see that framework was being set for the employment of all means to realize Hitler's Lebensraum ideology.

In keeping with the Bismarck traditions, Hitler launched his exterior manoeuvre to break out of the strategic

encirclement that the Allies had so cunningly contrived against Germany. Remaining within the threshold of his adversaries, he adopted a piecemeal strategy to shape environment before the actual war. In 1933, Germans exited the League of Nations, abrogated the Treaty of Versailles unilaterally and started a declared rearmament programme focused on high mobility and striking power. Germany also signed a peace pact with Poland to secure her Eastern flank against Russia. On 16th March 1935, Hitler announced re-introduction of conscription, embarked upon a programme of rearmament and recreated the German Air Force. He reoccupied Rhineland in 1936 and achieved two objectives, i.e. provided solace to his most violent supporters and tested the French insensitivity by getting a step closer. In 1936, he succeeded in founding an alliance with Italy and Japan, commonly known as Axis Powers Pact. In March 1938, Germany occupied Austria and secured her Southern Flank. This could also serve as a launch pad for Czechoslovakia. In October 1938, Sudetenland was secured only to occupy the remaining country/mainland the next year. This would envelop Poland. The whole World was startled in August 1939, when Hitler signed a non aggression pact with Russia. Later, when an emboldened Hitler demanded an access to East Prussia through Danzig corridor, Poland refused. Great Britain and France had declared full support for Poland in case German attacked her. If Germans were to invade Poland, it had to be through a very quick campaign before French could mobilize and attack in the West. The Doctrine of Blitzkrieg which was in making for the last two decades now came in handy.

## CHAPTER - II

### THE ART OF BLITZKRIEG

*"What is of greatest importance in war is extraordinary speed; one cannot afford to neglect opportunity. An attack may lack ingenuity, but it must be delivered with supernatural speed".*

*– Sun Tzu*

The origin of Blitzkrieg lay in the static deadlock of the World War I when both sides had expected the war to last only for weeks. Germans had pinned their hopes on the famous Schlieffen Plan to knock out France in days. The Allies had also foreseen a war fought in Napoleonic terms, concentrating superior forces at the decisive point to achieve quick victory. But this would work only, if compatible means and ways had been employed to achieve the desired end state. As the war progressed, efforts to break the logjam of stagnancy remained futile. Shock action through the weight of Artillery fire and use of gas provoked quick counter measures. In such highly frustrating circumstances, the first proto type tank conceived by the British came forth as the only hope of breaching defences and restoring mobilization on the battlefield. The very first tactical doctrine for employment of tanks, conceived by Swanton in 1916 emphasized a concentrated employment of tanks as a way to quick victory.

In 1918, "Storm Troop" tactics employed by German General Von Hutier caused the near collapse of Allied

defences. Hutier sought quick deep penetrations, bypassing and isolating strong points, to be assaulted later by reserves. Germans however, failed to exploit through the breach due to incompatible mobility of Artillery and Infantry. In 1919, Fuller's Paper, famously known as, "Plan 1919" laid the foundation of transformation and employment of mechanized forces. He emphasized, "Disorganization of enemy's command" as the initial objective by striking deep at his headquarters with the use of tanks while targeting supply and rear areas using air. Therefore, the breaking force would be launched followed by pursuing force of light tanks, Lorry borne Infantry and Cavalry, which would chase the disorganized enemy till he surrendered".

### **Evolution of Blitzkrieg Concept**

By the end of World War - I, essential ingredients of Blitzkrieg had become visible. The tank had been introduced by the Allies and aircraft had been used by both sides in the ground support role. Germans introduced the, "Art of Infiltration and Shock Action". Value of psychological dislocation had been recognized. In next two decades, eminent theorists analyzed the First World War and to contemplate the conduct of future war. An intense debate on tactical doctrines and operational concepts ensued and comprehensive trials/ manoeuvres were conducted.

*JFC Fuller* pioneered the formulation of tank doctrine and always emphasized on their bold and concentrated employment. In Battle of Cambrai in 1917, On Fuller's recommendation, 378 tanks were used in a concentrated form. He saw objective of grand tactics as paralysis and disintegration of enemy to be achieved through surprise, penetration and envelopment, through use of tanks. Fuller saw two types of tanks, light tanks to turn the flank while

heavy tank to effect a penetration by destroying enemy's armour. He also saw a coordinated use of Infantry and tanks together.

*Liddle Hart* saw great potential in combined arms, mechanized force with its flexibility to be able to operate on its own and affect enemy's morale. Both Fuller and Liddle Hart believed in the psychological dislocation of the enemy. The enemy must feel threatened from more than one direction thus throwing him into a dilemma as to how and where to position his forces. More so, his confusion must be aggravated by paralyzing his communication and command centres. Hart criticized Clausewitz for believing that the destruction of the enemy's will came below that of the destruction of his military power and country. He saw the strategic potentiality of armed forces for a long range thrust into enemy's rear, to cut his communications and arteries of supply, emphasized employment of aircraft and tank in tandem. Though later he moved closer to Douhet's idea of Air as 3rd dimension and an independent arm. His greatest contribution was his strategy of Indirect Approach.

Despite their vehement belief in the use of abundant mass in achieving a breakthrough, Russians were also working on the manoeuvre theory. Marshal Tukhachevski, so synonymous with "Deep Operation" theory came up with his two focal points. He thought an all arms battle was the answer to a mobile future war and the resources must be employed on the principle of simultaneity. His concept was that, a mass army operating on the whole front should remain in contact with the defender not only to pin the enemy but to achieve a favourable ratio for attrition. Decisive superiority would be achieved through enough reserves. Unfortunately for Russians, instead of them benefiting from the concept in the beginning, it was to benefit the Blitzkrieg.



Germans' formation of Blitzkrieg was typically historical. While Von Seeckt had laid the foundation to provide the pool of skilled operators to employ Blitzkrieg in a future war, Heinz Guderian anchored the transformation of German Army for a Blitzkrieg operation. Guderian keenly grasped the novel idea of using the armour enmass and synthesized all theories of the time. By 1935, Germans had carried out their trials and were getting ready for a combined arms employment integrating the use of air in ground support role. It was decided that only an elite mechanized armour force will be the focus of the development while rest of the Army will continue to look most of the same. Hence, a lesson from the Chinese master Sun Tzu that an extraordinary strike Force had to be created out of the ordinary Force. In 1935 trials, Guderian thought that enemy could not be beaten by this elite armoured force alone as it could not hold ground. So while Beck thought it was the follow-up mass army that will inflict the decisive damage, Guderian thought exactly the opposite. He was a proponent of all arms mechanized force with compatible mobility in which armoured elements will be accompanied and closely followed by others only then could they continue to force their push in the subsequent phases after the initial breakthrough. Beck however, believed in not having separate tank formations and tanks distributed in the Infantry formations for support role. Finally, Guderian prevailed and Panzer Division was formed. For raising a Panzer division, he followed the French model evolved by Charles De Gaulle. Hitler, who had been brushing aside all critics of spending too heavily on the development of Guderian's mechanized forces, knew its potentialities. He was fully cognizant of the ways and means which he was developing to achieve his desired objectives. Addressing 1935 Nazi party rally he said, "I should not negotiate for

months beforehand and make lengthy preparations. I should suddenly like a flash of lightning in the night, hurl myself upon the enemy". This is perhaps the first reference to the term Blitzkrieg and was popularized by the Western media.

### **Blitzkrieg- Manifestation of the Concept**

Blitzkrieg was modeled after the manoeuvre theory which draws its power mainly from opportunism and its effects directly proportionate to the velocity. Sun Tzu's analogy of a torrent of water perfectly fits the manoeuvre theory applied in the Blitzkrieg. Avoidance of battle was the main characteristic of Blitzkrieg. Their basic approach was that, if you were never going to be strong enough to fight and win a battle, you had to achieve operational aims without fighting one. This meant above all moving faster than the enemy could respond- or in American jargon, getting inside enemy's decision loop. Blitzkrieg stressed mobility and speed over firepower, although in the form of the tank, the dive bomber, and high velocity anti-tank or anti-aircraft gun. It aimed for greater firepower at decisive points. It employed concentrated air power offensively to prepare the way for advance, and in some situations even compensated for the absence of Artillery till it joined battle. The tanks would advance in echelons in timed waves with Infantry and Engineers ahead wherever a breach was required. The first move was to turn enemy tactically by a surprise penetration through a boundary or a weak spot. They were firm advocates of the Liddle Hart's indirect approach and of the principle emphasized by Jomini, 'Hazards of the difficult terrain are always preferable to the hazards of combat'. If the Germans encountered tanks, they would retire through anti-tank screen and then move around to out flank the enemy using infiltration tactics and flanking move for both Infantry and

Armour. Anything more than a passing encounter battle, a light skirmish had to be avoided. Once a fast moving force had got into enemy's depth and dislocated him at tactical level, it had to continue gaining depth fast enough in enemy's rear areas to keep one step ahead. Unlike the earlier doctrine, it aimed much at the disorientation and dislocation of the enemy command system rather than the annihilation of enemy forces. It was believed that, if dislocation could be achieved, the battle of annihilation might be avoided or at least made easier.

Hitler's national strategy had guided to shape the military doctrine, providing basic principles for employment of armed forces to achieve national objectives. Enough resources had been concentrated to achieve the force development goals accordingly. Hitler's extortions manifested his confidence level:-

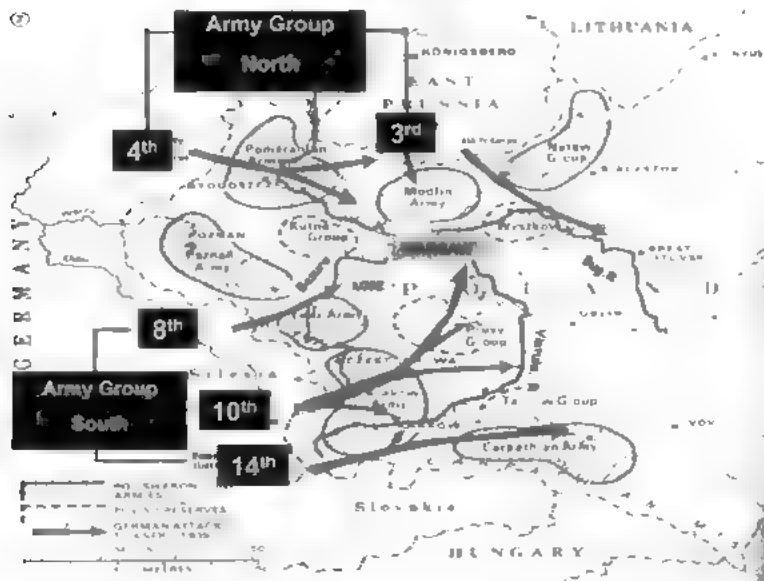
*Armies for the preparation of peace do not exist; they exist for triumphant exertion in war.*

*- Adolph Hitler*

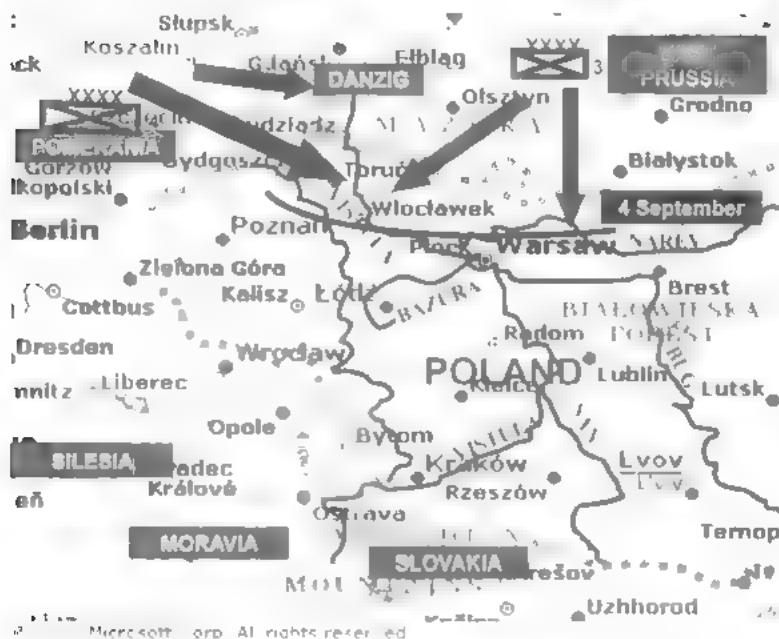
Map 10: German Design



Map 11: Battle of Frontiers



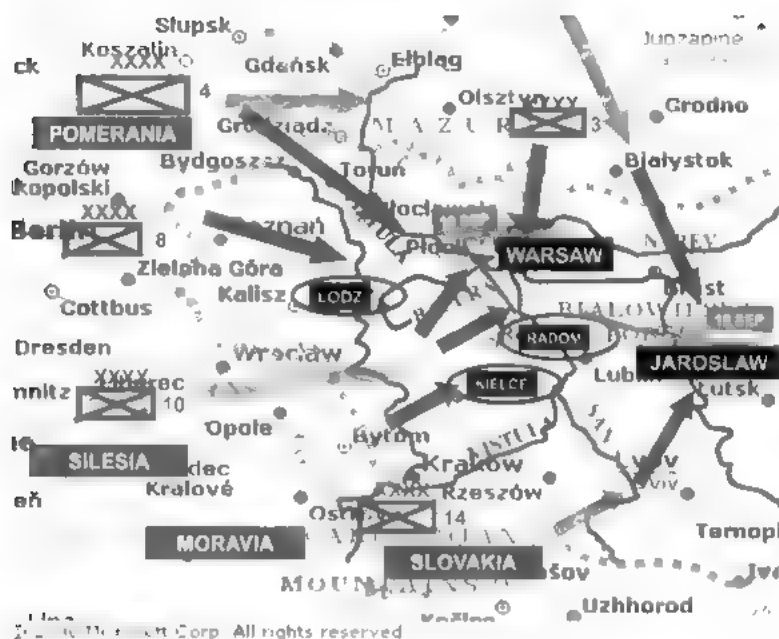
Map 12: Phase 1 - Army Group North



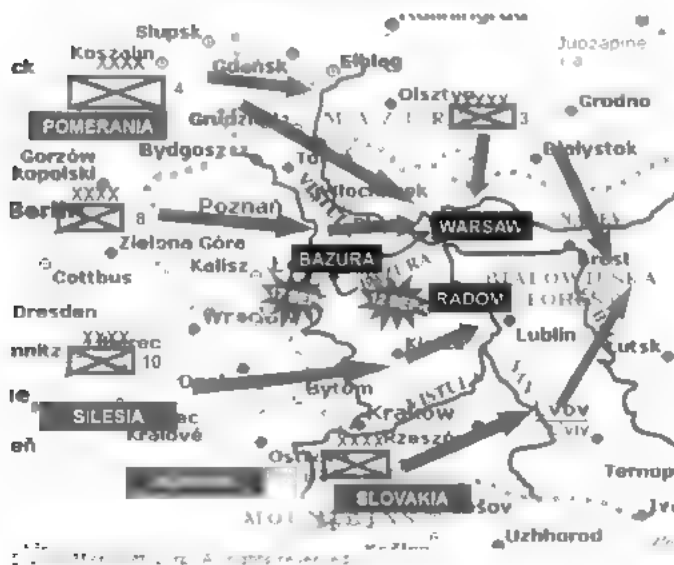
Map 13: Phase 1 - Army Group South



### Map 14: Exploitation Phase



### Map 15: Destruction



### Map 16: Russian Advance



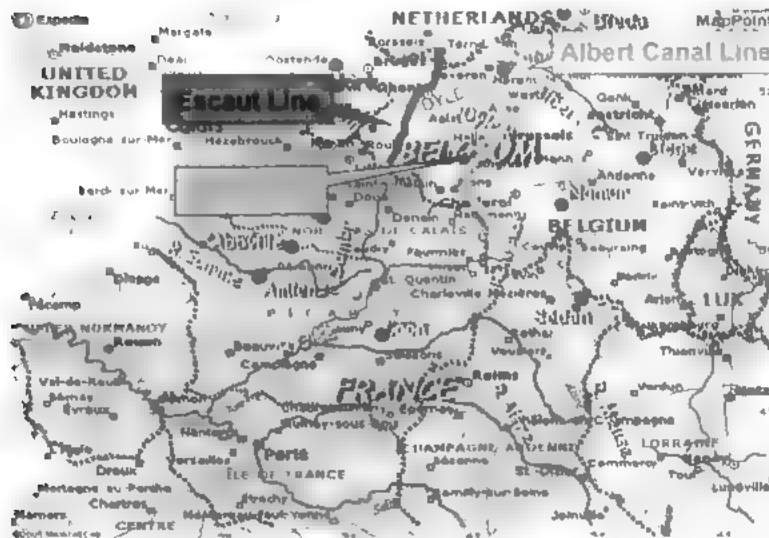
### Map 17: Strategic Direction



Map 18: Maginot Line

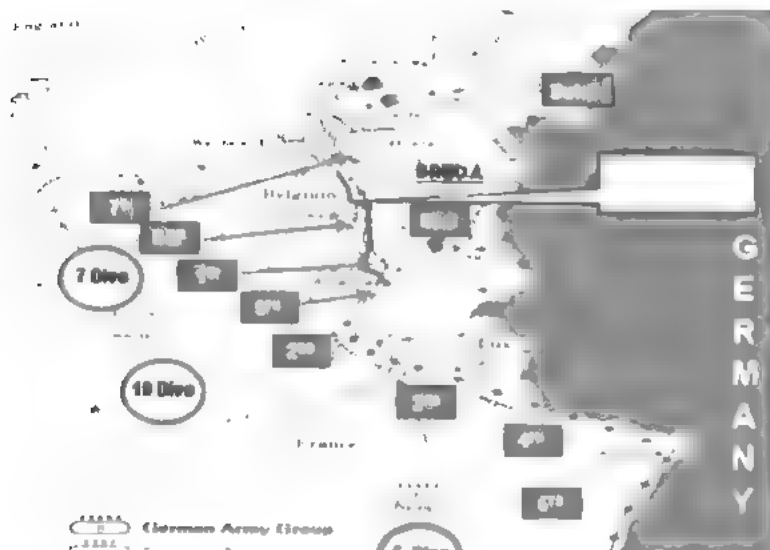


Map 19: Defence Options





Map 20: Dyle Plan



Map 21: Plan Yellow



### *CHAPTER - III*

## **POLISH CAMPAIGN- 1939**

The German invasion of Poland, "Operation White" on 1st September, 1939 marked the commencement of Second World War. In hindsight, the outcome of Polish Campaign appears a foregone conclusion, however, the German generals fearful of the war on two front scenario suffered serious anxiety. The duel was unequal as the newly modernized army of Europe's greatest industrial power was pitted against a smaller and ill equipped army. The imbalance was accentuated by the Germany's secret pact with Soviet Union to divide Poland amongst them after the war. Polish strategy hinged on the entry of France and Britain into the war, but this was not to be, as the French army after putting in an inconsequential attack in the Saar region, had gone to defensive behind Maginot line.

Even if the outcome of the Polish campaign was predictable, its nature was not as it employed the new Blitzkrieg Doctrine. This was to be a demonstration of a different style of warfare which blended the new technologies of tanks, combat aircrafts and radio communications to generate movement with speed, a lesson lost after the World War - I. The German assault was spearheaded by Panzer divisions instead of the more traditional infantry divisions whose shock and awe was further amplified by Stuka dive bombers. Even the more advanced armies of Europe were not prepared for such

an awesome demonstration much less the Polish Army which capitulated in two weeks. This campaign proved to be a crucial learning experience for the Wehrmacht. It uncovered the shortcomings in training and doctrine and made it possible to perfect the "Blitzkrieg" prior to its greatest challenge - Battle of France 1940.

Historical background of Poland appears quite interesting. The Country appeared and disappeared on the world map a number of times during the course of history. The end of 18th century saw Poland divided and occupied by Russia, Austro Hungarian Empire and Prussia. Only in the Napoleonic period did she briefly appear as a duchy of Warsaw but was re-divided among the three powers after 1815. Finally at the end of World War - I she emerged as an independent state, courtesy to the victorious allies in 1917. Treaty of Versailles and Riga ceded to her certain territories belonging to Germany and Russia. German territory in the east was ceded to Poland and Czechoslovakia by the victors who were bent upon stemming the germs of any further rise of the German power in the future. This sentiment was further exploited by Nazis who stoked this grave injustice to further their agenda and linked resurgence of German nation to violent seizure of Lebensraum in the east. The most significant irritant was the separation of East Prussia from rest of Germany by the former German territory known as Pomeranian Corridor. In addition German Baltic port city of Danzig had been converted into a "free city" under the League of Nations, to provide access to land locked Poland to the Baltic Sea. In the east some area of the province of Silesia had also been ceded to Poland especially the city of Poznan which had a significant German population. The Polish leadership's reluctance to negotiate on the irritants

of Danzig and a German land bridge to East Prussia played into Hitler's hands who settled the score through arms and thus plunging the world unwittingly into a world war. The Polish leadership also feared Soviet Union for its expansionist designs against Poland and had not excluded from all diplomatic discussions although Britain and France were inclined to include it in an anti German alliance. German diplomatic success in the 1938 and 1939 parleys and the apparent vacillation and weakness of Britain and France convinced Stalin to consider a treaty with Hitler. Stalin had his own territorial ambitions in the region and so long as Germany was ready to seize some territory, he decided to follow suit. Much of the Polish eastern region was part of Russia before 1918 and had a significant presence of Belorussian and Ukrainian population.

**Poland Fact File.** Poland's name stems from the Slavic word for "fields". Most of the western portion of the country is flat farmland. Poland had few natural defences, other than the Carpathians mountain chain running between Poland and Slovakia. With Slovakia a German puppet, German armed forces could attack Poland from three sides. Poland was a land locked country, sandwiched between two emerging powers of Nazi Germany in the West, and Bolshevik Russia in the East. A corridor had been carved out of pre war Germany to give her access to the Baltic Sea. Her frontiers were immensely wide – some 3,500 miles in all. The stretch of 1,250 miles adjoining German territory had recently been extended to 1,750 miles by the occupation of Czechoslovakia, difficulty in its defence. Western half of Poland formed a great salient with its snout pointing towards Berlin, flanked on the North by East Prussia and Pomerania and on the South by Silesia and Slovakia. It would attempt any aggressor to envelope

t from both sides. The terrain especially in the Western and Central Poland was flat and facilitated large scale armour operations. However, Carpathian Mountains in the south restricted large scale movement to few passes. Main Rivers were Vistula, Bug, San, Narev and Warta whereas main cities were Warsaw, Krakow, Poznan, Radom and Lublin. No worthwhile obstacle or natural defence line west of Vistula. San River was available. River Bug provided a second line of defence against Germany but latent threat from Russia compromised its position. River Narev and Bzura in the north and Carpathian Mountains in the south were considered natural barriers. Railway network was fairly well developed while road communication was under developed.

In 1939, Poland had a population of 35 million out of which 22 million were Poles and the rest were white Russians, Ukrainians, Jews and Germans. White Russians (about one million) were concentrated in north eastern region of Poland. Nearly four million Ukrainians populated eastern quarter, while, there were a million Germans living inside Poland. Poles were mainly living in western half of Poland and about two million Jews were dispersed throughout the country. The demographic composition and dispersion of various nationalities led to lack of national cohesion and various nationalities sought outside sympathies during the struggle for their survival. This demographic heterogeneity was fully exploited by Hitler to destabilize the Polish state before the invasion of Poland.

The existence of a weak Polish state between two giants, from whose territories it was carved out, placed her in a hopeless strategic position. The Polish leadership suffered from a trust deficit with both its neighbours

forcing her to enter into a strategic alliance with France. Polish leadership saw no option but to form an alliance with France and Britain who despite guarantees, could not come to her rescue in time. Concentration of its main population centres, natural resources and industrial region dictated a forward defensive posture. Four vital areas were: Polish Silesian coal fields laying on German frontier and in itself formed subsidiary salient between Upper Silesia and Slovakia; the industrial towns of Kiełce, Radom and Lublin which were 100-150 miles from the border; the industrial towns twenty to sixty miles North of Slovakia, most of armament, munitions factories, and motor works, coal, oil and petrol refineries were in this area; and the textile industries around Lodz which were eighty miles East of Silesia. Complete mobilization before the onset of war could not be ordered since all the manpower to be mobilized would paralyze the industries where they were employed. Besides, the western allies prevailed upon her for postponement of mobilization, till as late as 25 August, for fear of escalating the war.

### **Opposing Plans**

Poland's military aim was to defend territorial integrity of the country at all costs. Polish commanders had two options for defence: Forward defence of the borders that would protect industry, communications and major population centres but it left the army vulnerable to being outflanked, surrounded and destroyed in detail; and interior defence based on the major rivers that would effectively loose most of its industrial areas, some major cities, besides giving a dangerous signal of weakness to its allies that Poland could not defend its frontiers.

Relative Strength	Germany	Poland
Armoured Divisions	6	-
Motorised Divisions	4	-
Light Divisions	4	-
Infantry Divisions	45	30+10 (on mobilization)
Cavalry Brigades	1	11
Mechanized Brigades	-	1
Total Formations	59+1	40+12
Aircrafts	2400	500

Poland had 30 infantry divisions organised into ten corps, 11 cavalry brigades, one mountain, one motorised and one mechanized brigade. These elements were further grouped into seven Armies/Groups. In addition, 10 'Reserve' Divisions were to be raised on mobilisation. Poland ordered general mobilisation on 30 August 1939; but by then it was too late. The Polish High Command disposed its forces as per these given deployments. Pomorze Army consisting of 6 infantry divisions and 1 cavalry brigade was located in Danzig Corridor. Kutrzeba's Army was positioned at Poznan and Kalisz and it consisted of 3 infantry divisions and 1 cavalry brigade. Next was the Rommel's Army which was placed west of Lodz. It had 3 infantry divisions and 1 cavalry brigade at its disposal. At Cracow, astride Rivers Warta-Polca-Biala, Szyng's Army was stationed. Its composition was 5 infantry divisions and a single cavalry brigade. Przemyśl was the orbit of Sosnkowski's Army which consisted of four infantry divisions. Modlin Army was deployed north

of Warsaw against German forces attacking from East Prussia, with a force containing 2 infantry divisions and 2 cavalry brigades. Location of Narve Group was West of Białystok. It was tasked to hold line along Biebrza and River Narew along the East Prussian border, again with 2 infantry divisions and 2 cavalry brigades. Reserves were placed at West of Łódź (6 infantry divisions with 1 cavalry brigade and 1 motorized brigade), North of Warsaw - Wyszków (2 infantry divisions with 1 cavalry brigade), Kutno (2 infantry divisions with 1 cavalry brigade), and Tarnobrzeg (2 infantry divisions with 1 motorized brigade). Carpathian Army composed mainly of reserve units and Home Defence battalions looking after the Southern Flank. Polesie Group was formed east of Bug to look after presumed threat from Russia.

**Design of Defensive Battle.** In early 1939, the Polish General Staff began to reexamine its 1936 studies about a potential war with Germany. A new war plan code named Plan 'Z' was conceived in March 1939. The plan recognized that the main German effort would come from Silesia striking towards the north east. Based on the existing frontier fortifications, the Army would undertake delaying action so as to attrite the attacker and simultaneously complete the mobilization as most of the reserve manpower was to come from more populous provinces in the west. The purpose was to contest area in western Poland and preserve the Polish Army long enough for France and England, to attack in the west.

The defensive strategy was comprehensively articulated in the following manner. Exaggerated forward defensive posture was to be adopted with the principle defence in the north and the west with a fall-back position along Rivers Vistula – Bug – San. The 'Cracow' and 'Łódź' armies were to provide the main defensive strength and



blunt the German attacks. Local reserves were to block the German formations advancing on various identified thrust lines and a central reserve to react against enemy emanating from south-westerly direction of Silesia towards Warsaw. At an appropriate time the attempt was to be made to counter attack in the general area of Radom. The Polish defensive dispositions though spread over 1125 miles, had the advantage of interior lines. The Polish command decided to commit all formations, with the exception of insignificant units protecting the less threatened frontiers, against Germany; initially five armies and an independent group were placed in the front line, while an army and two lesser groups were in reserve.

The main concentration in the south was with the 'Cracow' Army (Syzling) and the 'Lodz' Army (Rommel), which were to oppose the expected main body of the attacking Germans. It however depended on whether the front line could be held or whether a retreat towards the southeast would be necessary so that, after regrouping, the defence could be resumed. The employment of the reserve army and its counter attacks, planned in a south westerly direction towards Radom - Piotrkow, would depend on the resistance offered by the front line armies. Provided it was possible systematically to absorb any retreating troops in a new front, there would still be forces available to slow down the main German thrust, prevent envelopment from the south, and provide an opportunity for the rest of the Polish units to withdraw in good order to new positions. Adjoining these southern groups were two armies well advanced towards the west and the north, Poznan and Pomorze. Group 'Kutno' was to guard its rear. The exposed position of these formations would have particularly adverse consequences if a rapid German penetration in the direction of Lodz and Warsaw

succeeded in cutting them off from the main body. To its north the 'Pomorze' Army was to be flanked by the 'Modlin' Army, mainly in order to block the way to Warsaw against the German forces attacking from East Prussia. This Army was supported on its eastern flank by the independent operational group 'Narev', which was to hold a line along the Biebrza and the Narev, and by the reserve group 'Wyszkow', intended either for a counter offensive from the Narev elbow against the wing of the Germans attacking in the Ciechanow - Modlin direction or as support for the 'Narev' group.

Polish mobilization had started on 23rd March. Altogether five formations, predominantly in the western districts, were brought up to war strength, and two divisions as well as a cavalry brigade were transferred from the interior of the country to the western frontier. These measures served as a reply to threatening German demands, and at the same time put the Polish mobilization and deployment system, in many to test. The main difficulty lay in protecting the Polish flanks. A threat to the Carpathian Frontier was taking ever-clearer shape, and the situation in Danzig likewise called for a re-examination of existing plans. Thus, the left wing in the south was extended all the way to the Hungarian frontier by the creation of a new 'Karpaty' (Carpathians) Army. As a result the Polish main front was extended by nearly 300 km. The assembly area of the Reserve Army was shifted to the south to relieve the 'Lodz' 10th Cavalry Brigade, which, being the only armoured and motorized formation of its size had originally been earmarked for the Reserve Army. Moreover, the Polish command created an additional reserve of two infantry divisions in the Tarnow area. In the north, the situation in Danzig led to the establishment of an intervention corps, which was to prevent the seizure

of the Free City by a coup de main prior to the outbreak of war.

### **German War Designs**

Early German studies of military actions against Poland included both a small campaign to seize the Pomeranian corridor including Danzig and a full scale campaign. The world reaction to the absorption of the Czech lands in 1939 and the ensuing partial Polish mobilization rendered a surprise seizure of Danzig unlikely. As a result Hitler ordered the planning of a full-scale invasion code named "Case White". Due to concerns over the possible reaction of the Western powers, the primary aim of the German planners was to ensure an extremely rapid destruction of the Polish army so that forces could be shifted westward to defend against the French action. Thus their military aim turned out to destroy Polish army west of Vistula and Narew rivers (**Map-10**).

Polish Army was to be annihilated with one swift decisive manoeuvre based on Blitzkrieg doctrine. Two pincers were planned to be launched from East Prussia - Pomerania in the North and from Silesia - Slovakia in the South; inner one enclosing at Warsaw - Vistula Line and the outer at River Bug Line. The design was based on the assumption that bulk of Polish Forces would be concentrated along the frontiers and in the Vistula Bend in order to defend strategically important zones of Poznan, Lodz, Radom and Cracow. Outer pincers were designed to seal off the zone of operation and unhinge Polish Army from Vistula Line if it succeeded to fall back and occupy that Line in strength. The Germans employed 42 infantry, 3 mountain, 6 armoured (Panzer), 4 light, 4 motorized divisions and 1 cavalry brigade, organized in two Army Groups under the overall command of General Von Brauchitsch as under.

**Army Group North (General Fedor Von Bock).** It comprised two armies having total of 5 infantry and 1 armoured corps. Under command these two armies were 17 infantry divisions, 2 Panzer divisions, 2 Motorized divisions and one cavalry brigade; in all 21 divisions. Its main task was to establish link between East Prussia and Pomerania by evicting Polish forces from the corridor and working southwards from East Prussia and eastwards astride Vistula, threatening Polish defences based on Vistula – Warsaw from the rear. The 3rd Army was commanded by General George Von Kuchler, located at East Prussia, and consisted of 7 Infantry divisions, and one each Panzer division, Motorized division and Cavalry brigade. The task of Army Group North was more challenging because of the geography. The two armies were physically separated by the Pomeranian corridor with the initial mission to reconnect East Prussia with rest of the Germany. Its main strength was directed in a thrust across Rivers Narev and the Bug towards the southern thrust. The western group of this army was to link up with 4th Army's thrust against Pomorze salient. The 4th Army was assigned Pomerania, under the command of General Gunther Von Kluge. Its task was to cut off Pomorze Salient. Thereafter link up with Third Army operating eastwards. The tasks of seizing the Polish coast and establishing contact with the Danzig Garrison were also assigned to this force. Force strength of the Army comprised 7 Infantry divisions, 2 Panzer divisions and 1 Light division.

**Army Group South (General Von Rundstedt).** This Group was considerably stronger. In all Army Group South had 8 infantry and 4 armoured corps, totalling 23 infantry, 3 Mountain, 4 Panzer, 4 Light and 2 Motorized divisions (total 36 x divisions). The 8th Army was commanded by General Johannes Von Blaskowitz. The Army was placed at

Central Silesia. Consisting of 8 Infantry divisions, its tasks were to contain Lodz Army and tie down as much of main reserve as possible by a gradual advance towards Lodz while ensuring protection of Tenth Army's flank operating in its south against Polish forces operating in Pomerania. General Walther Von Reichenau was at the head of 10th Army, at Upper Silesia. Tasks assigned to him were to reach Vistula from the direction of Kreutzburg, cutting Polish Armies in Pomorze and Pozania in conjunction with Northern Army Group. For this purpose, 6 Infantry divisions, 2 Panzer divisions and 1 Motorized Division were placed at his disposal. 14th Army, commanded by General Siegmund List, was located at Southern Silesia, Moravia and Slovakia. The Army included 8 Infantry divisions, 1 Panzer division and 2 Motorized divisions. The tasks given to this force were to contain and cut off from the east the Polish forces defending the industrial areas of Cracow, protect the flank of Tenth Army and to be prepared to launch an attack eastwards.

### Conduct of Operations

The conduct of battle has been divided into three phases. Phase 1 consisted of Battle of Frontiers, Phase 2 included Manoeuvre of exploitation and encirclement, and Phase 3 - the destruction. Phase 1 (**Map-11**) started at 0445 hours on 1 September 1939 and terminated on 3-4 September with the over running of frontier defences. The German ground attack was preceded by large scale air attacks by Luftwaffe. Two air fleets, 1st Air Fleet under the command of General Kesserling based in East Prussia and Pomerania and 4th Air Fleet under the command of General Loehr based in Silesia and Slovakia opened the attack on Poland on 1st September 1939 achieving complete surprise. They succeeded in gaining supremacy

in the air within 24 hours. Important cities, communication network, troop concentrations, railway junctions and aerodromes were bombed to cause crippling paralysis on the Polish mobilisation and command and communication system. The Polish Air Force, both in the air and on the ground, was soon annihilated giving Germans complete mastery of the air. The Third Army (Army Group North) attacked from East Prussia capturing Grudziadz and reaching river Narew opposite Ostrolika by 4 September **(Map-12)**. The holding attack in the centre made slow progress. The fourth Army commenced its attack across Polish Corridor at 0500 hours on 1 September. On 3 September, it had gained contact with the leading elements of Third Army South of Grudziadz. It had also encircled a portion of Polish forces defending the Corridor in wooded area West of Grudziadz and North of Shewetz and destroyed these on 4/5 September. Northern thrust established contact with the Danzig Garrison by the evening of 3rd September 1939.

Army Group South came into action. In response to its task of holding attack, the Eighth Army (predominantly infantry column) made numerous attacks on Lodz Army, but with limited objectives. By 4th September **(Map-13)**, it had advanced only 15-20 miles across Polish frontier. The Tenth Army made two columns with armour leading and infantry following closely behind armour/mechanized columns. Czestochowa fell on the very first day. Air attacks were most effective in this area which preceded the ground offensive. Tenth Army advanced 100 miles towards Radom. The initial battles in Fourteenth Army sector, particularly those fought by 8th and 27th Corps in the West, proved hard going and the proposed encirclement of the Poles around Cracow did not come about as expected due to tough resistance.

However, after having attacked through Orawa and Jablunka Passes, Panzer columns advanced upto 80 miles in four days while outflanking Cracow from the South.

Phase 2 (**Map-14**) was characterised by manoeuvres of exploitation by German Army in several directions. As envisaged the outer and inner pincers successfully cut off various groups of the Polish Army for their eventual destruction. Army Group North successfully unhinged Polish Forces from Narew – Vistula Line, Guderian's 19 Corps had started to operate east of Third Army providing the outer arm of the Northern pincer. By 10th September 1939, it had captured Zambrov and Bronsk. Army Group South identified two pockets of Polish forces, one forming around Kielce, Radom and Lodz and the second around Kutno in Bzura Valley. Tenth Army was tasked to defeat the enemy group assembling around Radom with its Southern column while its Northern column cut off Polish Army's route of withdrawal from Lodz to Warsaw by securing crossings over River Vistula. The Eighth Army, after securing Lodz on 9 September, turned northwards towards Bzura River. The German Fourteenth Army operating in two prongs/echelons, Panzer Corps followed by infantry formations accomplished its immediate objective of blocking San River when the leading elements of its Northern and Southern prongs reached Przemyśl, Jaroslaw and Samok on 9/10 September. Thus, on 10 September, the two prongs of the German outer pincer had reached the Bug and Przemyśl – Jaroslaw Area while the inner prongs were engaged in surrounding the Pomorze, Poznan and Lodz Armies around Bzura in Vistula Bend. On 6 September, Polish High Command decided to move its headquarters to Brest-Litovsk. On 8 September fresh orders were given to organise second line of defence

along Bug – Vistula – San, little realizing that the German outer pincer was only a day away from this Line.

Phase 3 (**Map-15**) aimed at elimination of Bzura and Radom pickets, link up of the two prongs of the other pincers and fall of Warsaw. The encircled Polish Forces around Lysa Gora – Radom made some heroic attempts to breakout but failed. The fighting in Kielce–Radom region finally died down on 12 September 1939 when the Germans bagged another 60,000 prisoners. On 10th September, Eighth Army reported a surprise attack against one of its divisions with a sizable force (approximately 10 divisions). The situation became critical as Eighth Army's counter attacks failed one after the other. Instead of acceding to Eighth Army's request for a Panzer Corps, the Army Group Headquarters decided to encircle and destroy the Polish forces North of Bzura. It tasked 213 and 221 Divisions (Army Groups Reserves) to continue their advance from the West, while 16 Panzer and 11 Corps were turned westwards to force the enemy to fight on reverse front. 3 Corps from Army Group North was also brought in to complete the encirclement. Eighth Army was asked to attack the enemy from the West once the encirclement was completed. The Poles attempted to breakout of the encirclement but failed and their resistance finally collapsed on 13 September. The Germans captured 1,70,000 prisoners and hundreds of artillery pieces, tanks and aircrafts. From Zambrov and Bronsk, the outer pincer of Army Group North moved further south towards Brest – Litovsk and Wlodwa while its inner pincer reached Vistula, North of Warsaw, on 13 September. In the South Fourteenth Army crossed San River on 11 September in Przemysl Area and attacked Lwow on 12 September. From Lwow, Fourteenth Army switched its main force north-



eastward in the direction of Vladimir and Kholm and on 16 September the advancing elements of this force linked up with elements of Guderian's 19 Corps.

On the Polish Army side, the dislocation caused by German advance had almost created mental paralysis on Polish High Command as the German speed of advance invariably out-paced Polish reaction capability. Orders to organise new lines of defence had to be cancelled and lines abandoned one after the other before their occupation. The Headquarters of Polish High Command remained constantly on the move and mostly the orders did not reach subordinate formations in time. On 17 September, the Russians attacked Poland from the East (**Map-16**) and on 18 September, the Polish High Command crossed into Rumania. After the Battle of Bzura, the Eighth Army invested the City on 25 September and compelled it to capitulate through a combination of artillery bombardment, air raids, and water and food blockade. The defences of the city finally capitulated on 27 September.

### **Polish Campaign Analysis**

Defeat of Poland did not come as a surprise but the rapidity with which they were overwhelmed, shook the whole World. The causes of this catastrophe can be found in German classical application of military strategy and successful application of new doctrine, i.e. Blitzkrieg to support the ends of operational strategy. The obsession with outmoded ideas, concepts and doctrines cost Poles the ultimate price. This defeat can be attributed to a number of factors.

Political aim of Poland was to safeguard her territorial integrity but lacked correlation of means and the end. Her unrealistic reliance on Britain and France, denied her

entering into an alliance with the Russia, the only country capable of providing support against German aggression. Thus, faulty Polish political strategy became one of main causes of her defeat. German political strategy against Poland was to isolate it through diplomatic dexterity. However, Hitler misread the signals of the British Government conveyed by Lord Halifax and continued to view Britain tacit in his support. Hitler's grand political strategy hinged on repudiation of the treaty of Versailles and through his piecemeal strategy, wanted to establish his hegemony over Europe.

Weaknesses of Polish dispositions were many: exaggerated forward defensive posture with over extended defences which resulted in dilution of forces particularly astride the main avenues of approach in the South exposing them unnecessarily to double envelopment and destruction, could not attrite the attacker as planned and failed to trade space for time, despite having prior knowledge of the offensive designs of Germany they lost precious time in building a proper defence line in the west to protect vital areas; reliance on primitive and unreliable communication means (line wires of World War I vintage) which were susceptible to frequent breakage and resulted in communication blackouts at all levels; unnecessary delay in launching the flank attack against German 8th Army which ultimately led to their encirclement and destruction, and incompatible mobility of reserves to counter German breakthroughs.

Germans attacked with three pronged offensive with main effort in the south had number of implications **(Map-17)** By concentrating superior forces in the south the Germans not only took advantage of the favourable terrain but also threatened vital areas of Poland which caused dispersion on them. Polish military commanders

could not determine the direction of main German offensive. On identifying the main late, they failed to reinforce the Southern Front in time. River Vistula and San were protecting the German flanks against any counter offensive from eastern direction. The rapid advance of 10th and 14th Armies in South (100 and 80 miles respectively) caused the complete breakdown of Polish command and communication infrastructure thus greatly inhibiting the employment of central reserves.

The superiority of strategic orientation was obtained by the Germans by concentrating superior forces against politically and strategically sensitive areas of Radom - Lodz. By skilful widespread assembly of forces, Germans caused dispersion on the Poles. Their assembly in East Prussia, Pomerania, lower Silesia and Slovakia outflanked the Poles right from the outset especially in the South. It provided for an ideal convergence of efforts resulting into encirclement of Polish forces. Any efforts to address this error including formation of a new command proved too late. The entire defensive planning of the Poles was based on fighting positional warfare. They placed their trust in power of defence and failed to appreciate the influence of firepower and mobility on the battlefield. The Germans on the other hand, developed the doctrine of Blitzkrieg, employing armoured formations independently with close air support to affect deep penetrations and cause psychological dislocation in the Polish system of forces. The German preparatory manoeuvre comprised assembly of forces from multiple directions taking full advantage of geography while operating on exterior lines which caused dispersion on Polish Forces and diluted them in space. A multi pronged offensive made a speedy breakthrough concurrently creating space for the main manoeuvre, which broke the time and space bondage of

Polish Forces. The offensive operational cycle was thus completed comprising deep pincers which ensured the piecemeal destruction and capitulation of Polish Army at Radom, Bzura and Warsaw.

Germans achieved surprise by convincing the Poles that Hitler's sabre rattling was mere coercion to accede to his demands. The overt diplomatic offensive launched by Germany was in line with the general belief that war could be averted. The Poles till the last minute relied on a diplomatic solution to the problem of territorial dispute with Germany. The British and French assurance to help Poles against any aggression by Germany further substantiated their false sense of security. This did not allow the political leadership to give clear directive to the military, hence a delayed mobilization. Configuration of the Polish frontiers gave Germans an advantage of operating on exterior lines with pincers emanating from three directions against the Poles. They fully exploited this advantage due to their superiority in number of tanks and air, mobility and the doctrine. The difficulties of the Poles, who were operating on interior lines, were aggravated due to an exaggerated forward defensive posture, lack of adequate mobile reserves, poor communication network and their incoherent defense. As Moltke said, "The unquestionable advantages of Inner Lines of Operations are valid only as long as you retain enough space to advance against one enemy by a number of marches, thus gaining time to beat and to pursue him, and then to turn against the other who is in the meantime merely watched. If this space is however narrowed down to the extent that you cannot attack one enemy without running the risk of meeting the other who attacks you from the flank or rear, then the strategic advantage of Inner Lines turns into the tactical

disadvantage or encirclement" This could only be done by mechanized forces.

Despite having the advantage of operations on interior lines, the Polish defense neither allowed elasticity in defense nor could condition them due to inadequate mobility of reserves and lack of defensive preparation. Even the half-hearted counter stroke launched by the strategic reserves against the 8th Army was soon contained along River Bzura. The Poles therefore could not even complete their defensive operational cycle. The German exterior maneuver and discreet assembly of forces did not provide the Poles sufficient mobilization time. Subsequently Germans beat the Poles in terms of time at each stage as the battle unfolded. They got no time to launch an organized counter attack, neither could they fall back and occupy another defensive line. This allowed the Germans to encircle the withdrawing enemy both West and East of Vistula. Germans quick Blitzkrieg maneuvers finished the war much before Britain and France could launch offensive against Germany in the West to relieve pressure as promised. The psyche of defending every inch of ground made Polish weak everywhere as they diluted themselves over space. The Germans utilized space ideally and gained enough space for generation of combat power.

The Polish high command endeavoured to achieve balance in their system of forces through retaining reserves, however, same could not be achieved due to lack of mobility and incomplete mobilization. This state of imbalance which prevailed during the entire campaign was exploited by the Germans to the utmost. The destruction of the armed forces of Poland was the strategic objective and the Germans correctly identified

the strategic reserves as Polish centre of gravity. This centre of gravity was dislocated and neutralized by the Germans, right in the beginning of campaign. Contrarily Poles seemed to have considered a combination of their Industrial areas, armed forces and Capital (Warsaw) as their centre of gravity and ventured to defend all three. Polish High Command also failed to identify the centre of gravity of German Forces which lay in their Panzer Corps and superior operational concept.

German offensive opened with large scale aerial bombardments and by the end of the first day Luftwaffe had gained complete mastery of the air. As a result, for the remaining duration of war, all Polish movements were constantly interdicted in addition to intimate support to the German strike formations. Shortage of antiaircraft and anti tank weapons began to tell on the Polish forces soon after the battle of frontiers when the Panzer divisions began to exploit gaps in the defences. In the absence of any organized defence in depth and no weapons to stop both ingredients of Blitzkrieg, combination of aircraft and tank became unstoppable. In Polish Campaign intimate logistic support was ensured to keep pace with the operations of the mechanized columns. However, there were exceptions also. In case of Guderian's Corps during its dash across Bug they ran out of fuel for which replenishment by air was carried out.

## *CHAPTER - IV*

### **BATTLE OF FRANCE**

A quick Polish collapse had emboldened Hitler, and he immediately issued his directive for invasion of France. However due to unavodable circumstances, the actual operation was pended till the next year. As the German offensive against France and Low Countries opened on 10th May 1940; they were met with an enemy of the kind that every aggressor would wish to fight. French had been surprised and fell for every German trick. The French front co lapsed in just s x days and the Government fell in s x weeks. Germans must be credited for such a transformation of their forces and employment of superior operational strategy to achieve such startling successes. Strategic surprise has been the single most dominating factor in achieving a paralysis of the French, preventing them from recovering during the course of the remaining campaign.

The zone of operation encompassed Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg and France forming a peninsula, encircled on three sides by North Sea, English Channer and Atlantic Ocean. The Zone comprised typical European flat, mildly undulating plateaus suitable for armour operations, except where rivers and canals in Holland and Northern part of Belgium and France, form natural barriers to any offensive from the East. The important ones are Rhine, Meuse, Sambre, Aisne, Somme, Dyle, Escaut and Albert Canal. In the centre is the Ardennes forest with a depth of

50 miles. Located East of Luxembourg, it stretched upto River Meuse. Tank and vehicular movement was restricted to specified roads and tracks. The French considered this forest to be impassable for any large size mechanized formations. Maginot Line, in the South facing Germans was a very strong artificial obstacle extending 170 miles to the Swiss border in the South. Across Meuse, the area had a well developed communication infrastructure connecting important places and facilitating large scale mobile operations. The important towns/cities in the area starting from the North are Rotterdam, Breda, St Leonard, Antwerp, Brussels, Maastricht, Gembloux, Namur, Dinant, Sedan, Paris, Amiens, Abbeville, Arras, Boulogne, Calais and Dunkirk.

The relative strength of the opposing forces at the outbreak of hostilities was as under:-

<b>Relative Strength</b>	<b>Germany</b>	<b>Allies</b>
Total Manpower	2,758,000	2,776,000
Infantry Divisions	121	113
Armoured Divisions	10	3
Motorised/Light Mechanized Divisions	5	8
Tanks	2700	2400-3000
Artillery Pieces	7700	11,200
Air Force	3000-3200	1900

Numerically both sides were generally at par. However, the German leadership was far more superior and the German soldiers were better motivated and experienced through Polish Campaign. French claim of a superior



officer corps was not visible during the war. Germans fielded fifty two active divisions while the remaining came from the reserves having doubtful capability for offensive operations. The Allies had approximately sixty five frontline divisions including forty five French, ten British Expeditionary Force (BEF) and ten Belgian. Allies thus had a numerical superiority over the Germans in number of divisions. Numerically both the sides were at par. The French tanks were heavy but slow with long range guns and had limited radius of action. Whereas, the German tanks were lighter in armour and armament, but had a far greater radius of action and more speed with matching wireless communication facility. Organizationally, the German armour was well grouped. They had Panzer Divisions under Panzer Corps to undertake mass and deep thrusting manoeuvres in conformity with the Blitzkrieg concept. The development strategy and the employment doctrine that they followed had been conceived and matured by Guderian. The Allies on the other hand had distributed their tanks into units, which were grouped with cavalry and Infantry divisions. Their employment was mostly envisaged on defensive role.

The Allies had preponderance in Artillery, and their guns were superior in quality. It lacked requisite mobility and organization. The Germans enjoyed 2:1 superiority in numbers. However, the quality of aircrafts on both sides was compatible. The Germans planned to go for tactical use of air force by employing Stuka dive bombers in support of their Panzer formations as flying Artillery platform. The Allies on the other hand went for strategic bombing.

### **Opposing Plans**

The French military thinking was dominated by 'defensive doggedness', as some analysts called it. Their

belief was firm on the brittle static defence based mostly on obstacles and fortifications. Behind these obstacles were the covering reserves of mobile formations to restore any breach. In February 1940, French Chief of Staff's visualization/ hypothesization as presented to the Allied War Committee were clear. In the South, the Maginot Line was very powerful, enemy would not risk to attack on it, while an outflanking move through Switzerland was improbable (**Map-18**). In the centre, Meuse River with its steep banks and wooded height of Ardennes was impassable to armoured and motorized formations. The only possibility was of an outflanking attack through Belgium, a renewal of Schlieffen Plan. He emphatically said that he was convinced, in the centre the terrain would defend itself and the best way was to put our best formations in the North to defeat the German attack. It had been assumed that the Germans would not respect the neutrality of the Low Countries and would attack through it. Yet, the Low Countries themselves wanted to remain neutral to any war till attacked. For the Allies, this had serious implications for getting into defences in a highly reduced reaction time only after the war got initiated. Hence with that background in mind the French considered three options (**Map-19**). -

**Albert Canal – Meuse Line.** Join Belgians in their defences on the line Albert Canal- Meuse. Although, this option suited both French and Belgians the most, but was ruled out due to neutrality of Allies reducing reaction time.

**Escaut Line.** Move up French forces to the Escaut Line to effectively cover the French industrial area in the North while Belgians would occupy their defences along Albert-Meuse Line. A weak plan as it would cover only part of the area.

**Dyle- Breda Plan.** While it was assumed that the Belgium would hold the Germans long enough along Albert Canal, French Forces would move and occupy Line Dyle along Antwerp Namur Line. It presented a short front and kept the enemy well away from Flanders and the Coast Line.

Once Belgians promised to fight the Germans on their front lines, plan to occupy Dyle – Breda Line was adopted after approval from Supreme Council (**Map-20**). In the final shape, 1st Army and the BEF were to cover Line Dyle. Breda alternative had been included at later stage, to extend a helping hand to the Dutch with 7th Army, the French strategic reserves, consisting of seven best divisions. In the North, a force equivalent of three armies, and consisting thirty, first rate divisions including two armoured, three mechanized and five motorised divisions, were to be used. Twenty two Belgian divisions already along the frontier would take the total to fifty two. In the centre along Meuse River, from across Ardennes 2nd and 9th Army comprising only twelve mediocre divisions would take care of 95 miles of the quiet sector. A covering force of four light cavalry divisions, half of them horses were to cover any enemy moving through Ardennes. In the South, on the Maginot Line total of four armies were to be deployed with thirty three divisions, ten garrison divisions and a British division, total forty four divisions. As far as Reserves were concerned, 7 Divisions (2 armoured divisions) were to be deployed in North, 5 Divisions in the South, and 10 Divisions including 1 armoured division behind the centre.

The defence now manifested two strong flanks and a weak centre with insufficient strategic reserve. The French thus presented a recipe for their division at the

hands of the Germans. Army's strategic reserve was being moved off to Breda denuding the centre of any significant reaction capability. Not that French had lesser resources but their distribution of forces was questionable. Only ten divisions were earmarked for Dyle Line and still eighty divisions for the remaining zone. Strength of fortified Maginot Line with its strong fortifications, despite being considered to be impregnable was not exploited as manifested in the allocation of forces. More than half of French forces had been given to this Sector at the cost of the uncovered centre, five divisions out of which were kept against any out flanking from the South. Earmarking 7th Army for Breda proved to be the biggest imbalancing factor. Deployment in the North was to commence only after initiation of hostilities as the Belgians thought their political neutrality to be too sacrosanct, hence least reaction time for preparation of defences. An element of imbalance was noticeable even before the war had started. French visualized that the enemy would never come through Ardennes except in utter desperation if they were checked in Belgium. This would take considerable time to change direction and bringing forward artillery and reinforcements. Contrary to their defence doctrine which suggested strong reserves to restore any breaches in the defence, they visualized all battle taking place on the forward trenches only.

### **The German Plan**

Hitler envisioned a quick and decisive victory in France with total destruction of all allied forces convincing Britain to accept her domination on the European continent. He wanted then to turn east again before Russia could even mobilize. Hitler issued his directive for an outflanking move through Belgium in order to secure as much ground as possible in Holland, Belgium and Northern France,

and enjoy a favourable position for pursuing the land and air war against France and Britain. Plan Yellow, as it was called was rooted in the famous Schlieffen Plan (**Map-21**). Main Effort was in the form of Army Group B (Bock). Comprising three Armies of forty three divisions, including nine armoured and four motorized, were to strike in the North and push through Holland and Belgium up to the Coast Line. Army Group A (Rundstedt) consisted of two armies of twenty two divisions, this Group was to cover the southern flank of the Main Effort advancing through Ardennes. Comprising two armies of eighteen divisions, Army Group C (Leeb) was to operate from Siegfried Line and fix the forces deployed on Maginot Line. Group 'N' was to operate in Holland. Seventeen infantry divisions and two motorized divisions were retained as Central Army Reserve.

Like the Allies, German themselves were so familiar and overwhelmed with the Schlieffen Plan ever since World War - I that they adopted it with much exuberance. Manstein, Rundstedt's Chief of Staff was the only one who voiced serious reservations and sounded his disapproval. His reservations were: With so obvious a plan there existed no possibility of attaining a strategic surprise and the assembly could not have been concealed. German main effort would run into enemy's strength resulting into unacceptable losses and a stalemate. Most, it could push the Allies to Somme which would form another front. This would negate the Liddle Hart's strategy of indirect approach. He also saw the context of Schlieffen Plan in the previous war, missing here. In 1914, French were planning an offensive through Alsace-Lorraine. Schlieffen Plan thus also encompassed to strike in the rear of the French offensive in a revolving door manoeuvre. Manstein saw the Southern flank of the offensive seriously exposed to the French counter offensive from the South.

Manstein's suggested alternative was more comprehensive. Reinforcing the Allied perception that German offensive was planned through North Army Group B was to launch a preparatory manoeuvre against Belgium and Holland simulating this as main effort to draw in as much enemy as possible. Concentrating all Panzer Forces in Army Group A, strike the French with surprise in a relative vacuum in the centre, through the Ardennes and pushing the defending troops back to Somme. It was intended to isolate and trap all her forces in the North. Once the Allied forces in the North had been annihilated, turn south and attack Maginot Line from the rear. An additional army be allocated to Group A to secure against any counter offensive from the South. However, Manstein himself said, "If this plan offered the best chances of success, it was also the riskiest". He also feared if the allies discovered German design, it would grind the whole offensive to a halt, especially considering difficulty of the terrain and time required to shift forces out of Ardennes. Hitler, who was not comfortable with Plan Yellow, got enamoured with Manstein's idea when he got a wind of it. He was still in two minds, when a liaison plane crashed in January 1940 with details of Plan Yellow, which fell in enemy hands. This caused Hitler to change his plan. His only worry though was to ascertain whether Panzers could cross Ardennes; this was confirmed affirmatively by Guderian and also through an old terrain analysis report written by Liddle Hart after the World War - I.

The whole Manstein plan hinged on reinforcing enemy's perception of an offensive coming through North, and using an offensive baited gambit. Hence, a preparatory manoeuvre was planned to initially distract maximum Allied forces to North and subsequently the Northern push was to be so regulated that these allied forces remained

tioned in the Area. With a view to draw bulk of Allied Armies to the North through an offensive baited-gambit, 6th and 17th Army (Army Group B) comprising twenty nine divisions including three Panzer divisions were to invade Holland and Belgium. (One Panzer division was planned for Holland and two for Belgium). By 15th May, D+6, these Panzer divisions were to divert to Army Group A in the centre. Main effort of 4th, 12th and 16th Armies (Army Group A), total forty four divisions, including seven out of ten Panzer divisions, was to make a rapid crossing of Ardennes and the Meuse River, between Sedan and Dinant, and establish bridgeheads with a view to exploit towards the coast line. 12th Army was allotted to this Group to ward-off any threat of counter attack from the South, on the advice of Manstein. It was then to turn North to destroy the entrapped enemy. Army Group C comprising 1st and 7th Armies, having seventeen divisions were to engage French on Maginot Line. Forty two divisions were kept as reserve which included no armour division. Main weight of Panzers was in the centre with seven Panzer divisions while two were earmarked for Belgium and one for Holland. Later these were also to divert towards centre to join the decisive punch.

### **Conduct of Operations**

The invasion of the West opened on the left flank on the key points in the neutral Holland and Belgium. Before the opening of the offensive, German Air Force undertook offensive operations. A preparatory manoeuvre was undertaken by the Allies through widely dispersed assemblies keeping the French in a dilemma while reinforcing their perception showing the weight of attack facing Belgium. In the wee hours of 10th May 1940, while the ground forces crossed Meuse River on the Dutch borders heading towards Breda, Airborne Para

Forces were directed against the bridges at Rotterdam, Dordrecht and Moredijk over River Rhine. These bridges were to be used by the ground forces. Simultaneously, landings were being done in Hague to capture government Offices, Services Headquarters and the command centres. Luftwaffe destroyed all Dutch Air Force on the ground and the German tanks rushed through the border 100 miles to the East to join up with Airborne Forces on the 3rd day south of Rotterdam. On the fifth day, Dutch surrendered.

The 7th Army (General Henri Giraud) was to make for Antwerp and then push on along the coast to link up with "Dutch Fortress" on the line Breda – St. Leonard. The BEF was to take up positions along the Dyle River between Louvain and Wavre. The 1st Army (General Blanchard) was to block the "Gembloux gap" between Wavre and Namur. South of Namur, and below the line of the Sambre – Meuse River, the 9th Army (General Corap) was to swing its left flank as far as the Belgian part of the Meuse River, between Namur and Givet. Its right flank was on the French part of the Meuse River between Givet and the junction of the Bar River. The 2nd Army, the right-hand army of French 1st Army Group, was to remain in its positions along the Meuse River and the Chiers, between Pont-a-Bar the left of the Maginot Line.

Simultaneously with Holland, preceded by air raids, Para Troopers were launched on the bridges over Albert Canal and Eben Emael Fort and captured them successfully. The Canal defences were about to be turned from the Eastern flank. The Cavalry Corps of the light motorized division was tasked to go ahead of the defensive position of the 1st Army as covering force till 15th May while 1st Army prepared/occupied its defences along the Dyle Line in their AOR. The covering forces started its move six and half hours late. It was to traverse 80 miles before reaching



its covering position along the frontier but ironically French and British Forces had yet not commenced their move. As 7th Army reached Breda, Dutch had withdrawn North beyond Meuse River and denied a link up, the very purpose of the whole move. 7th Army was ordered to move back and reposition itself behind Escaut Line. On 11th May, as 16th Panzer Corps crossed Meuse River at Maastricht, threatened by the outflanking move on the right, the Belgians were vacating Albert Canal defences. 1st Army was nowhere in sight. Only three motorized divisions had crossed the Franco-Belgium Frontier. The Cavalry Corps was feeling too weak to hold for next five days as they found their enemy very dynamic and their covering positions unprepared. By 12th May only two thirds of 1st Army had reached its defensive position, covering force was facing pressure of the German Panzers and assessed that the enemy would reach the Dyle Line the next day. The French thus panicked and sent their two reinforcements, including 1st and 2nd Armoured Divisions to 1st Army. Out of the remaining reserves, 3rd Armoured Division and two Infantry Divisions had been sent down south for 2nd Army.

As the covering battle was in progress on the 13th May 1940 about 9 miles ahead of Dyle, last elements of 1st Army were getting into position. On the 14th morning, Panzers contacted Dyle near Gembloux. Covering troops fell behind as reserves but instead of retaining them as one cohesive entity, they were distributed along the defences. Allies put up good resistance and the first proper tank battle took place here. Hence, by now the whole of 7th Army, the Cavalry Corps, reserves of 1st Army and 9th Army, two of the three Armoured Divisions had been moved in Belgium piecemeal and were hemmed in a constricted space. On the 15th May, left most corps of 9th

Army was under attack from Meuse River and withdrawing thus exposing the right flank of 1st Army. This prompted 1st Army to withdraw from Dyle Line without having fought significantly. Same evening the French ordered a general withdrawal. Germans had consciously regulated their offensive to keep the French forces committed in this Sector. On 16th May, Panzer Corps having accomplished its task of keeping the French reserves in Belgium, was taken off Von Bock and allocated to the Central Group. German forces did not break through the Belgian defences till 24th May.

**Operations in France.** Germans advanced through Ardennes along the circuitous mountainous roads in the dense woods for days and the vehicle train was spread across 60 miles in depth. Artillery guns and supporting arms were struck in the traffic mess in their respective order of march. On the 12th May 1940, French cavalry screens in Ardennes fearing outflanking after minor exchange of fire withdrew across Meuse River by the evening and had abandoned Sedan loop. Germans spearheads had contacted Meuse River on three points of application as per plan. Guderian with his three Armoured Divisions contacted Sedan, while Reinhardt with two divisions was to go for Motherme. Hoth's corps of two divisions was to cover the Northern flank on Dinant by moving in tandem. Germans decided to benefit from the surprise achieved, and open the breach using armoured divisions and took the help of Luftwaffe to compensate for absence of Artillery. As per French estimates, the Germans were not in a position to attack for the next 6-7 days till they brought their Artillery and ammunition forward. On the first night the enemy bridgehead had been extended only for about 4 miles across Meuse River with only limited Infantry in it. Even though French 10th

Corps Commander assembled an armoured brigade size group for an ideal counter attack, they were caught off in fugitives and retreating French vehicles, so were late to achieve any effect. Reinhardt in the centre faced the stiffest opposition, and failed to breakthrough. Guderian had struck the gap between 2nd Army and 9th Army, overthrowing left Corps of the 2nd Army and turning 9th Army's southern flank. On 14th May, twice, the opportunities for counter attack by 3rd Armoured Division were missed, especially when Guderian was turning west after crossing the Sedan southward. At the last minute the orders were changed for, "Containment now and counter attack the next morning". Since that did not happen, the counter attacking 3rd Armoured Division was divided in small groups and distributed over the whole of 2nd Army front. A counter attack thereafter was history. Towards Dinant also, once the Germans decided to move 1st Armoured Division, it was too late as it went only in insignificantly small groups.

Things were going great for the Germans, except in the Reinhardt area. The other two flanking prongs separated 40 miles apart by Ardennes Hill (Reinhardt Area) in the centre were making progress. By 15th, 9th Army was in full retreat and the bridgehead had been taken as deep as 35 miles. German Panzers had reached River Oise and Sambre by the 16th May 1940. Fear of a French counter attack from Verdun-Chalons area unnerved Army Group A and Guderian was ordered to halt. After serious altercations did he get permission for 'Reconnoitre in Force'. By 18th May, he had reached Peronne. Same day, Charles De' Gaulle, with a hurriedly organised 4 Armoured Division, counter attacked from the South from Leon but could not hold their gains. 25 miles wide corridor of 156 miles depth had been created just in 4 days. Guderian had

established bridgehead along Somme River and secured Avesnes by 20th May. Motorised Infantry had closed up and secured his southern flank along Somme River. BEF switched its base to Dunkirk after having been severed from Cherbourg. Within the Central Sector the progress had been slow as the 1st Army had put up stiff fight, although their counter attacks along this axis were equally disastrous and 1st Armoured Division was badly battered. On the 19th May, Hoth was still at Cambrai waiting for Rommel's Infantry to catch up with his Panzers. However, Rommel was able to reach general area of Arras. On 21st May, a counter attack led by BEF by the newly formed Franco Force was planned with seven divisions but actually only a regimental size attack could be launched in Arras albeit not to much effect. Rommel forced BEF back to Bethune. Guderian, with his both flanks secured, moved North along the coast and captured Boulogne by 23rd and Calais by 24th May. Dunkirk was visible just 12 miles away. By 24th May five Panzer divisions were on the Canal Line which the British had reinforced.

**Destruction Phase.** On 24th May 1940, in the North, Bock created a gap between BEF and the Belgium forces, and the British were forced to withdraw to Dunkirk. Hitler intervened with the most controversial order of this campaign, and put a restriction on further operations towards Dunkirk till he allowed Guderian to resume his destruction of forces in the Dunkirk pocket on 26th May. It was too late as the Canal Defences in all this while had been reinforced. Near Bethune, Rommel linked up with 6th Army and surrounded the French 1st Army in Belgium. On 28th May, Belgium surrendered and by 30th May, most of the British and some French forces were within Dunkirk pocket. On 29th May, all armour had been withdrawn from the Canal Line and the task of destroying

the Allied forces in Dunkirk was given to Luftwaffe with a group of ten Infantry divisions formed out of Army Group North. By 5th June, when the Germans managed to reach Dunkirk, 3, 38,226 British, Belgian and French troops had been evacuated in a miraculous effort.

Next, the Germans redeployed one hundred and twenty divisions along the Somme and Aisne Rivers for an offensive Southward with another twenty three divisions as reserves. The French had total of sixty five depleted and demoralized divisions. The Germans had planned three pronged attack. Rundstedt with forty five divisions would attack East of Paris, driving a wedge between 2nd and the 4th Army Group; Bock with his fifty divisions was to launch an attack towards Seine while Von Leeb was to attack from across Maginot Line at Saarbrücken and Colmar. Starting on 5th June, Bock had reached Seine by 9th June. French 9th Corps resisting in this area was then surrounded by Rommel and surrendered on the 12th June when trapped along the coast line. In the West, Guderian took some time to break the crust, however broke through Chaion and headed south. French now overwhelmed by enormity of attack from multiple directions, Maginot Line being threatened from its rear, started deserting their defences. Bock was heading South West and Rundstedt South East. On the 14th June, Germans entered Paris. On 17th June, they had reached Loire, Nevers and the Swiss border. French signed their surrender document on the 22nd June 1940.

## CHAPTER - V

### ANALYSIS AND LESSONS

Hitler gave *strategy of indirect approach* a new extension both at grand strategic and operational level. Within Germany, he applied his psychological strategy in the political campaign to gain control of Germany by playing off Capitalists versus Socialists' interests. Turning outward, he first encouraged support of General Franco in Spain threatening the rear of France and Britain. Then he turned east and started unwinding the girdle woven around Germany by France, hitting at the foundations of the Allied strategy against Germany. His securing of Austria and then Czechoslovakia had not only reversed her strategic encirclement but also laid Poland absolutely bare from her Southern flank. Liddle Hart has described this exterior manoeuvre as, 'Modern equivalent, on a wider scale and higher plane, of the classical art of manoeuvring for position before offering the battle'. Throughout its course, Germany's strength had been growing, both directly by the vast development of her armaments, and indirectly by subtraction of her potential main opponents. The Allies on the other hand remained complacent and lost opportunity of working with Russians even before the Polish Campaign. At the operational strategic level, despite superiority in modern means of attack, Germans were conscious not to go for direct assault at any level. Instead of attempting to breach Maginot Line anywhere, it lured the Allies out of their defences to the North and struck behind them through Ardennes with a thrust at the

uncovered hinge of the French advance. Hitler had said, "I shall manoeuvre France right out of her Maginot Line without losing a single soldier". Even at tactical level, the Germans corresponded with their strategy and preferred to go for soft spots in defences. Their emphasis was going round the enemy and cause paralysis and psychological dislocation.

Although the Germans used all three factors of *Time, Space and Relative Strength (TSR)* to their advantage, it was their synergetic application that brought such a quick yet significant victory. Using time and space to their advantage, they brought superior relative strength at the decisive point and time. Now these three will be analysed individually. The Germans gained time ascendancy over the Allies by being ahead of them in all phases of operation by taking initiative in their hands. During preparatory phase, it was the gradual assembly of their auxiliary in the North, which reoriented the Allied defences. Subsequently this auxiliary not only lured the best part of French reserves and the Allied forces but also created a vacuum in the Centre to help the main progress in its offensive. Subsequently also, speed of this auxiliary was regulated to keep all reserves and reinforcements tied there. The French, in the North were late both in occupying their defences on the Dyle Line, and in reaching Breda. In the Centre, when vacuum was created, the Germans surprised the French again by taking a time lead and broke through Sedan to exploit the vacuum to the West Coast by capitalizing on lack of friction. The French were late in all their responses and their counter attacks were always too late with too little forces. The French appreciated that 7-9 days would be required to build up for offensive across Meuse River. The spearheading German mechanized columns contacted French defences

on the Meuse River on 3rd day and without waiting for Infantry and Artillery to catch up, proceeded to establish a foot hold across the River the next day. A contentious decision to halt the Panzer advance short of Dunkirk allowed the Allies time to escape destruction. Thus, a violation of the element of time did not allow the Germans the achievement of the strategic objective that they had set for themselves.

The Germans used space very convincingly as under. They secured their base of operation and a foothold across River Meuse for build up of breaking-in forces. Since enemy's forces including his reserves, had been displaced from this sector, they could generate full combat power of all three Panzer Corps in the face of least resistance. As their offensive progressed westward, they placed additional forces along two flanks which fortunately fell on two Rivers, Somme in the South and Sambre in the North, to secure space for security of manoeuvre. Meanwhile, Germans attempted to deny all critical spaces to the Allies by beating them with the speed of their manoeuvre. The French design to develop a cohesive defence along River Oise and Sambre to block German's rapid movement by either reinforcing any sector from elsewhere or launching a cohesive counter attack would not have worked. Even in North, the German's rapid movement compressed the space so much that any counter offensive would have been denied sufficient space for getting launched and generation of combat power. While actually being almost equal, the Germans achieved a relative strength superiority of 3.8:1 at the decisive point in the centre. Undoubtedly, all intangibles were strongly in favour of Germans.

Retrospectively, one finds that there existed total *harmony in the policy and strategy* in pursuing the



War that Hitler never wanted to be turned into a Global Conflict. Hitler's objective was to establish Germany's hegemony over Europe and his politico military aim was to dominate Europe militarily. He wanted to isolate Britain from Europe, so that it accepted its domination of the continent. This was only a step to achieve victory, as the real long term objective lay in the East. Militarily, this meant total destruction of Dutch, Belgian, French and British forces through a quick and decisive operation. The strategy totally remained aligned with this objective from the day Hitler took over as he developed all means, political, economics, military and psycho-social, to employ them for the attainment of these objectives. Even, the new weapons being built, and the doctrine evolved was to realize the military strategy objectives for quick destruction of Allied Forces in the West. It was also manifested by accommodating Manstein's views to change German plan to prevent a cost prohibitive operation that had the potential of running into a stalemate. Even during the conduct phase, OKW displayed a total control of the entire campaign right from the stage of inception to the stage of destruction. On the contrary, the conception and execution of French Defence Plan was not carried out by the single commander of the Allies. It was therefore, difficult for them to get orders executed promptly and effectively. Attributing such a harmony, to Hitler's unity of command through his authoritarian rule will perhaps be an attempt to undermine his marvellous feat in his preparation for war.

French miscalculation in employment of the strategic reserves in the wrong direction and inadequate mobility denied them the benefits of *operating on interior/ exterior lines*. However, for the Germans; ideal supportive conditions existed in France to adopt the exterior lines of operation, converging at Coast. Their greater mobility,

superior air force, a better doctrine and organised logistics turned their exterior lines disadvantage into an advantage.

The Germans used superior operational art by correctly identifying the Allied *Centre of Gravity* in the Allied reserves. The Germans decided to tackle this Centre of Gravity through an indirect approach and displaced it off centre to destroy it after encircling it from the rear. The Allies miserably failed to identify German's 'Centre of Gravity' which lay in their Panzer Divisions, superior Air Force and Blitzkrieg Doctrine. Since the notions of Centre of Gravity and Balance are so closely linked, its manifestation can also be best understood if viewed together. Displacement of the French centre of gravity broke the hidden bondage of time and space that revealed immediately as the German main offensive unfolded through an unexpected sector. The balance of the French system of forces got disturbed as their reserves were unable to intervene with the main thrust in the centre within the resistance capacity of these defensive forces, which we saw proved to be one to two nights. Subsequently, as the German offensive kept advancing preventing the French reinforcements from other sectors, or any counter offensive in this sector, the imbalance became critical. The Germans during the manoeuvres of exploitation in French campaign became imbalanced a few times when their Centre of Gravity, i.e. Panzers exposed their flanks to a counter attack and their Lines of communication were stretched and so threatened. Had these Panzers been checked at this stage, the results would have been different. However, the French failed to exploit this vulnerability primarily due to German's speed of operations.

During the battle of France, Germans never reached the *culminating point* which can be attributed to the

adoption of indirect approach, speed of operations and superior stratagem and surprise. They were rarely confronted with a stiff opposition except towards North. The whole campaign became one sided affair. As a matter of fact, once the Germans were launching their 2nd phase against the Mainland France on 5th June, the French had been depleted to more than half of their actual physical strength apart from the moral degradation. When paralysed the Allies were never in a position to hasten Germans culminating point by degrading them.

The Germans were able to achieve the following main and subsidiary effects which all combined created the desired *strategic effect* of their capitulation. Germans dislocated the French both in physical and moral sphere. In the physical sphere, it was due to upsetting their balance by displacing French central reserves to North, away from the intended main effort. Sheer weight and momentum of offensive in a relative vacuum pre-empted possible reactions. Thus, they were forced into an unexpected front, their support was endangered and line of retreat was threatened. Psychological dislocation came as a sequel when the French Commanders felt that they were at a sudden disadvantage and had been trapped, the next logical step therefore was a paralysis as was visible in their inability to take any decision. Germans by taking all measures to reinforce Allied perception of their offensive from the North distracted them from putting main defensive effort including placement of reserve in the centre. Their careful assembly posing multiple threats to North or to South across Maginot Line caused dispersion on the French resources. Isolating the Allied forces in the North and South by strategic penetration and establishing a Panzer corridor in the centre, caused division of the Allied forces.

The German offensive against France was an appropriate example of the *offensive operational cycle* in which the preparatory manoeuvre relied chiefly on baited gambit and a skilful assembly of forces. The initial breakthrough was achieved on River Meuse, which was closely followed by the main manoeuvre of exploitation through a combination of Panzers and German air force. The destruction phase, however, was left incomplete due to the decision to halt the Panzers short of Dunkirk thus allowing the encircled Allies to escape. The ultimate objective of the offensive, i.e. the destruction of the Allies could not be achieved.

Securing Meuse River through Ardennes met the criteria of an ideal *strategic objective* by creating dilemma for the French. It gave a number of options to Germans, i.e. to turn north and attack the main defensive effort from the rear, go south for Maginot Line or straight for the Coast Line. They took the last course with the enemy still guessing about their intentions. Another aspect while selecting strategic objectives is to ascertain their relation to enemy dispositions and his strategic balance. The area between Dinant and Sedan selected by the Germans for the Main Effort was held very thinly and that too by second rate troops. The already inadequate reserves were also located away. Therefore, once a breach was made, the entire French defence system lost its cohesion and started to disintegrate. The German selection of the Coast Line and its ports had immense strategic value, as it helped to isolate major part of the Allied Forces in the North, thereby, creating conducive environment for their ultimate destruction. Similarly, they also selected intermediate objectives very intelligently, which facilitated achievement of the final aim. One example is securing of northern bank of River Somme. This not only helped

to isolate the Allied forces located in the South but also ensured security to their manoeuvre.

'The soundest strategy in war is to postpone operations until the moral disintegration of the enemy renders the delivery of the mortal blow most possible and easy' – Valadimir Lenin. Hitler firmly believed in the power of propaganda (*psychological warfare*) to achieve psychological ascendancy and impose own will over that of the enemy. He said, "People have killed only when they could not achieve their aims in other ways . . . There is a broadened strategy, with intellectual weapons . . . why should I demoralize the enemy by military means if I can do so better and more cheaply in other ways? Our strategy is to destroy the enemy within, to conquer him through himself." Equating it with the current realization of the importance of Information Warfare, Nazi propaganda of their invincibility and revolution was the most effective weapon before and during the war. In the prevailing politico economic environment, despite their repressive ways, people saw no alternative but to join them for their own salvation. Even at operational level, they used electronic and print media to magnify their achievements to demoralize the enemy and terrorize him through bombing raids with siren fitted aircrafts, thus achieving the desired effects.

Hitler did not maintain his aim of destroying all Allied Forces in the Northern pocket sealed by German forces. This undermined the maintained *harmony between policy and strategy* as the escaped forces made the difference in the force ratio at later stages of the war. According to Fuller, force must be divided in protective, offensive and reserves. In this campaign, an ideal distribution of force based on an indirect approach was carried out. Army Group North induced the elite BEF, French 1st,

7th and 9th Armies only with twenty nine divisions and imbalanced the enemy. Army Group C comprising just nineteen divisions fixed fifty one of the French divisions. The main effort of Army Group B comprising forty five divisions thrust through the least occupied space to strike in his rear for optimum results. 12th Army was specially allocated to the centre to protect the southern flank of the main effort at Somme River. Adequate reserves were also held to make any adjustments. The ratio vis-à-vis effect in each effort was:-

Effort	Germans	French	Ratio
Main in the Centre	45	12	3.5:1
Auxiliary in the South	19	45	1 :2.7
Auxiliary in the North	29	52	1: 1.7

*A novel doctrine - force multiplier* was in action. The attack on France was an ideal manifestation of the concept of Blitzkrieg. The Ardennes woodlands gave the Germans an ideal advantage of surprise. Beyond Meuse River, the landscape of France was ideally suited to these sweeping armour manoeuvres in conjunction with air. This novel technique was applied in the spirit in which it was conceived. The innovative concept of Blitzkrieg was success as it incorporated the use of a host of force multipliers, which were able to overwhelm the adversary both physically and psychologically. The close integration of air with the land forces during all stages of the operation proved decisive. Use of fifth columnists and the paratroopers vindicated the concept of simultaneity, again for the first time. The psychological warfare and propaganda launched by the Germans contributed greatly to the overall design. All this could only be achieved with

the superior leadership that was available in the form of German General Staff. We believe that not the doctrine itself but its unexpected early use achieved surprise, and the defender failed to come up with a matching response against it. Richard Simpkin has argued that gestation period between a new innovation in a piece of equipment or a technique becoming feasible, and fully adopted is between 30-50 years. Taking Fuller's 1919 Plan as the starting point of the idea of large scale employment of Armour formations, the Germans implemented it in only twenty years.

The magnitude and complexity of the operation warranted most deliberately worked out *logistics* lest the whole operation failed. Not a single logistical crisis was reported at any stage. All Panzer formations carried their supplies on the additional transport allotted to them to carry 4,800 tons of supplies. Large scale fuel storage sites were established near the border prior to the campaign. During the battle, an elaborate system of refuelling by jerrycans carried on all vehicles was worked out. On some rare occasion even the supplies were forward placed on the air transport as well.

### **Campaign Lessons**

There are three crucial decisions that were taken with their wide ranging implications. Firstly, after quick breakthrough over Meuse, Germans were faced with a dilemma; which way to go? Three options were presented. Go north, envelope Allies on the front lines and destroy them. Go South, outflank Maginot Line ultimately destroying forces in South. Or else go West to the coast line, cause strategic division and bag all the enemy in the north. A much bigger prize was that - a decision taken professionally with a dispassionate analysis. Secondly,

Hitler's decision to halt operation for two days allowed Allied time to escape entrapment, surprised every German associated with battle. No evidence of the cause but three probable reasons are cited: First, tried to appease Britain to negotiate peace with her acceptance of German's instead of French hegemony. Hitler's own version is that he allowed Panzer formations to recuperate for the next phase. The strongest view is Hitler's service bias for Luftwaffe. Goering, Luftwaffe Chief was close to Hitler and influenced him to get the credit for a job of destroying the enemy. A decision done on non professional reasons! Thirdly, premature move of French reserves to North- imbalance created just to extend a helping hand to a neighbouring country- appeasement of an ally, an emotional preposterous decision that cost them the campaign. Lesson - decisions must be made professional y after a dispassionate analysis and consultations rather than emotionalism.

Defense emerged as a stronger form of War. It would be unjust to blame Polish and French simply because they were on the defensive. But then the defender has to be dynamic in conception and execution. The French faltered on two accounts. Firstly, they failed to harness the strength of defence. Defence is a stronger form of warfare provided attacker is compelled to breach through its strength and not weakness. Hence it is a duel. If the attacker circumvents strength, the defender loses. At the same time, to avert a defeat, the defender must ensure that his defences are not by passed, flanks are held in strength and enemy is forced to 'attack on strength by penetration'. The Germans broke through the weakest spots. Clausewitz propounds that defence necessarily includes transition to offensive action. A situation totally defensive, strategically and tactically, could bring no

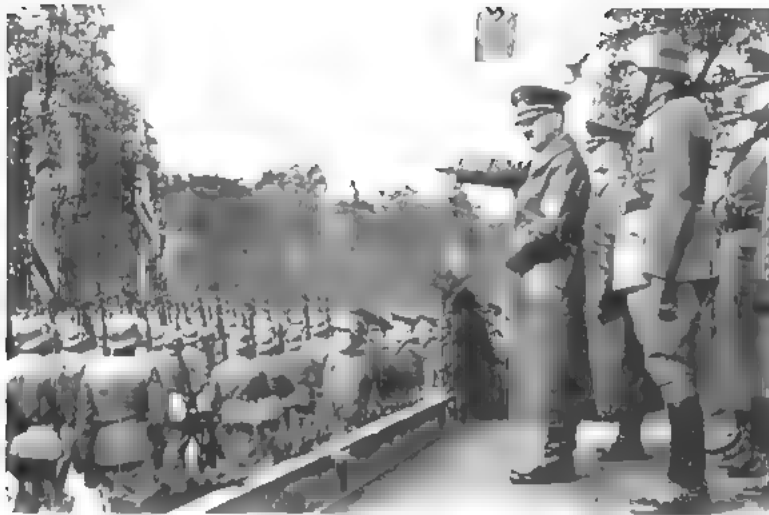


results (Willisen's Theory). Attacker will only reach a 'Culminating Point' if attrition is caused. French could not complete their defensive operational cycle. They neither conditioned their enemy by fighting the defensive battle nor could they employ any reserves as per their own doctrine. Where all could they have exploited opportunities: While building up in the Ardennes, Germans were stretched for 60 miles; while crossing Meuse River or building up in the bridgehead; and while overstretched during their advance towards West Coast, presented a number of opportunities.

Germans classic application of offensive baited gambit drew maximum Allied Forces to the North while the main effort through the centre achieved total surprise by coming through the Ardennes. Achievement of surprise is one of the most difficult things to apply and takes a host of measures. But it is clear that to achieve surprise, it is easier to reinforce enemy's perception than to change it. Germans used the same logic at a number of occasions: The Western Governments were not expecting the Germans to be ready for War against the West before 1944. Hitler reinforced it in his pronouncements, French calculated that Germans, even if surprised them by coming through Ardennes, will need 9 days to cross Meuse River after contacting it, which was sufficient reaction time. Germans reinforced this perception and also worked around it to do it in one night; Blitzkrieg was a doctrine under evolution in UK and France. Why did they then get surprised when it was applied against them? As per Richard Simpkin, gestation period between a new innovation in a piece of equipment or a technique, becoming feasible, and fully adopted is between 30-50 years. Taking Fuller's 1919 Plan as the starting point, only within 20 years in 1939 the Germans were applying the new doctrine. Hence it was

not the doctrine itself alone as much as the timeframe within which it was applied that surprised everyone. In each case they employed a different form of manoeuvre; Double envelopment in Poland, central rupture in France and parallel axis in Russia.

Guderian was associated with mechanization of German Army since he was a captain. He shared with Hitler, his great love for automobiles. Von Seeckt took upon himself to train the German officers after Versailles and even smuggled them to Russia for training. Von Rundstedt, Leeb and Kliest are some of his produce. Liddle Hart and JFC Fuller spent life time on their theories. Such a convincing defeat of Allies in the West was brought about by the Germans application of superior strategy in combination with a novel doctrine vis-à-vis the Ales. How differently the belligerents understood their enemies and the nature of war that they would pursue, mattered a great deal. With a promise of quick and decisive results, Blitzkrieg will always remain an attractive proposition.



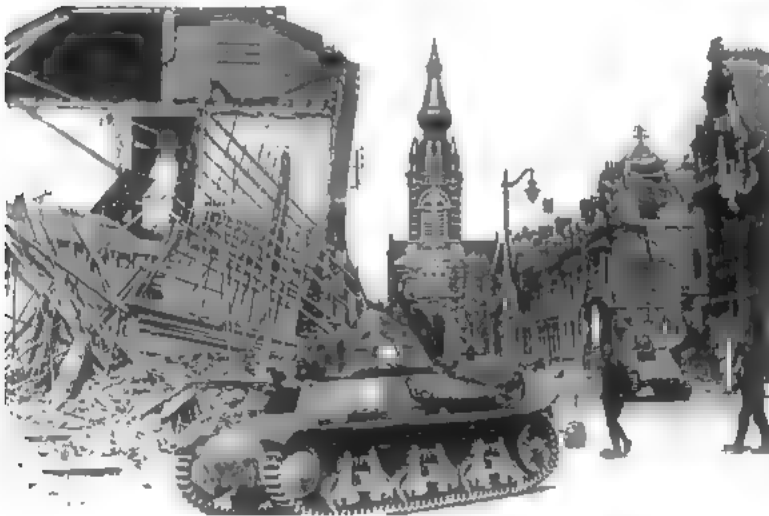
Adolf Hitler welcomes the Wehrmacht troops in Warsaw, October 5, 1939 after the German invasion into Poland.



Hitler at the Eiffel Tower the next day after the official surrender of France - June 23, 1940.



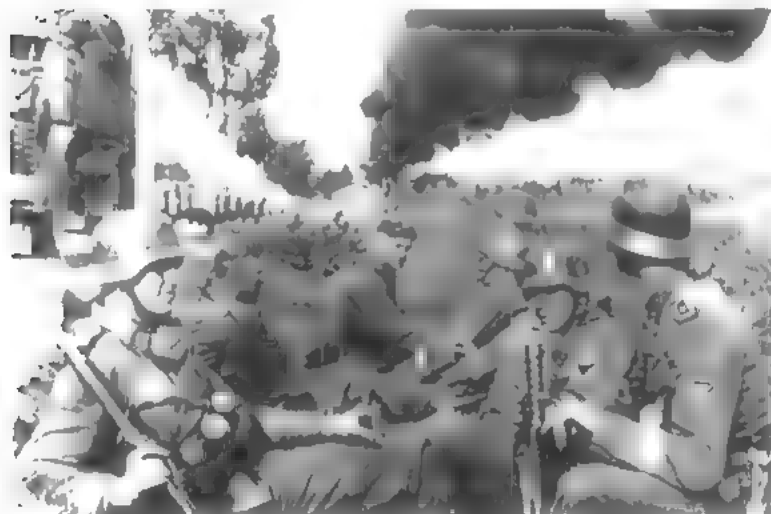
Collapsed streets of Warsaw, March 6, 1940.



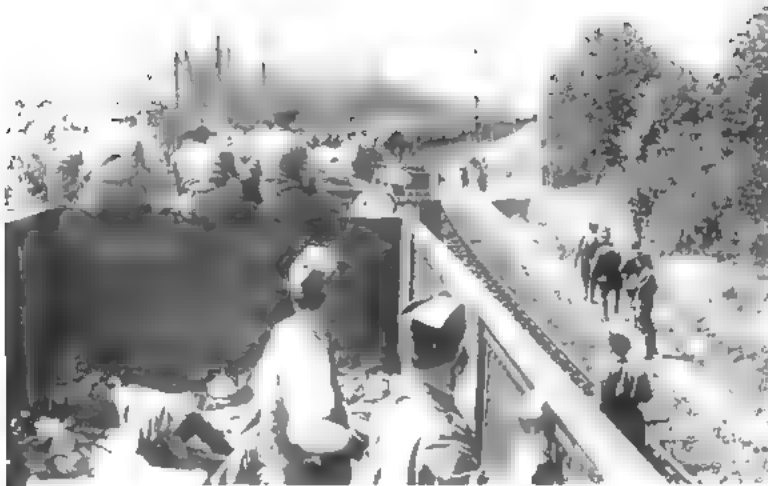
French tanks were destroyed in the town on the way to the front  
- May 25, 1940.



Refugees flee their destroyed houses in Belgium after the bombing of the Nazis on May 19.



Soldiers of the 1st SS Panzer Division on the way to Pabianice during the invasion of Poland in 1939.



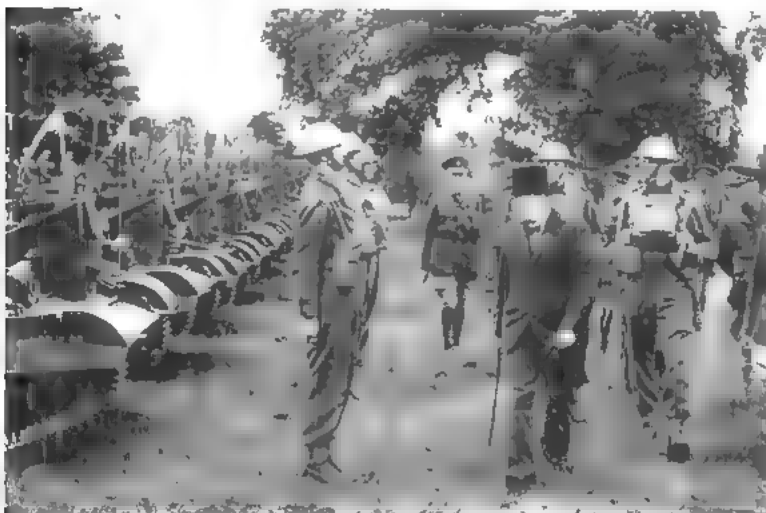
Retreating Polish Army units onboard a train head to an evacuation point after the collapse of French defenses during the German invasion.



The German infantry moving cautiously on the outskirts of Warsaw, September 16, 1939.



The young Pole has returned to where his house once was, now turned into ruins during a break in the shelling from the air in Warsaw in September 39th.



Winston Churchill inspecting Guards Grenadier Regiment

## ***Part Three***

### **THE BATTLE OF GHAZALA 1941-42 AND SIGNIFICACANCE OF SLOCs/ SUPPLIES IN THE N.AFRICAN CAMPAIGN**

#### ***Study Panel***

Lt Col Syed Jafar Abbas  
Lt Col Muhammad Chiragh Haider  
Capt S Mahmood Shahzad (PN)

(2008 – 2009)





## *CHAPTER - I*

# **SIGNIFICANCE OF SLOCs AND LOGISTICS**

Mussolini, the Italian Premier joined the war against the Allies in June 1940 in a quest to expand Italian Empire with focused attention towards North Africa. Whereas Hitler, along with his High Command, being preoccupied with planning for invasion of Russia, was not seriously interested in North Africa. Hitler resolved to enter the North African theatre as a politico – alliance compulsion. The aim was modestly defensive for which limited forces were to be employed. This was a strategic error. Between “Operation Sea Lion” and before “Operation Barbarossa” commenced a unique strategic opportunity to seize North Africa which was missed by Hitler. This indirect approach could have favourably concluded the war with Britain. In October 1940, General Thoma, a German Armour expert after the study of North Africa concluded that four Panzer divisions could capture Egypt / Middle East and be maintained logistically. At that time nearly a dozen German Panzer divisions were available unemployed. Had four of them been employed against the inexperienced, ill equipped British Armoured Divisions, the Middle East could have fallen to the Germans. This would have ejected the British Navy from the Mediterranean, delivered the oil sources to the Axis, and severed the shortest link of Britain to India and Australia and brought Turkey and Iran on the Axis side. Soviet Union could have become vulnerable to offensive from both directions, the west and the south.

However, the critical time was wasted and instead Hitler and his High Command launched "Operation Barbarossa" in June 1941 which was costly and ultimately became the cause of his defeat.

North Africa at that point in time was a colonial legacy occupied by different European powers. The British controlled Middle East, Palestine, Egypt and East Africa (Sudan, Kenya and British Somaliland), the Italians held Libya and East Africa and French established their colonies in West/ Central Africa, Tunisia and parts of Somaliland. The British had approximately 50,000 troops in Egypt. General Wavel was the Commander-in-Chief of all British land forces in the Middle East with Headquarters in Cairo. Major General O'Connor was Commander Western Desert Forces deployed in North African Theatre. Italy was maintaining nearly half a million troops in Africa including their native colonial troops under the command of Marshal Graziani. In fact prior to the commencement of the Second World War, all the belligerents of the war were having specific interests in North Africa.

Italy had long standing interests in Africa that dated back to the 19th Century. During 1930s Italy moved to strengthen its position in the Middle East and embarked upon an expansion of the Colonial Empire by invading and annexing Ethiopia in 1936 and increasing the size of their Army in Libya. Italy then established the "Africa Orientale Italiana" (Italian East Africa) that encompassed Libya, Italian Somaliland and Ethiopia. Mussolini had the ambition to convert the Mediterranean Sea into an Italian basin and increase its influence to the level enjoyed during Roman Empire. Besides Palestine, colonies in Africa and the Iraqi oil fields British interests relevant to North African Campaign were linked with the Suez Canal. The Suez Canal represented a strategic link in the sea lines of

communications within the British Empire. Although Egypt had obtained independence in 1922, Britain retained close ties and in 1936 signed the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty which gave Britain the right to station forces in Egypt during peacetime and reinforce the troops in time of war. Hitler showed little interest in Africa, except that it was the province of his European ally, Mussolini. Germany's main interest was towards Russia and it entered North Africa to help its ally.

### **Opposing Maritime Strategies**

War in the Mediterranean was directly focused on the territorial objectives in North Africa. It was a war, however, in which both sides had to depend upon sea borne supplies for their armies. The campaign in North Africa was to be decisively affected by the naval struggle to control the central basin of Mediterranean. The British Mediterranean Fleet endeavoured to achieve control of Mediterranean, through the traditional British naval policy of seeking out and destroying the enemy fleet in a decisive battle. In addition realizing the importance of Malta, British Strategy was: to defend Malta at all cost, maintain offensive posture and seek decisive battle with Italians, and ensure unhindered logistic support through sea.

Italian Navy, on the other hand, despite being superior in number, refused to let her fleet be drawn into battle and adopted the strategy of Fleet-in-Being, essentially with a defensive posture. During the entire campaign, Italian Navy's policy was to remain defensive at each end of the Mediterranean. They were, however, prepared to act offensively or counter-offensively in the Central Mediterranean, only when confronted with inferior forces of the enemy. The Italian strategy was to maintain

overall defensive posture in the Eastern and Western Mediterranean (Fleet in Being). Italy wanted to protect SLOCs between Italy and her armies in Libya. To achieve it, they planned to deploy submarines in the offensive posture. In the meantime, Italians wanted to disrupt allied SLOCs by laying mines around Malta and in Sicilian Strait.

The Italian ally, German maritime strategy upon intervention in the Mediterranean theatre was three fold: to maintain overall offensive posture in the Mediterranean, to disrupt Allied SLOCs, and to support Italian Navy against British Navy. Both forces had limited air support provided by their independent air forces, which considered naval operations as a secondary task. Thus, the control of SLOCs in the Central Mediterranean and favourable air situation kept oscillating between British and Italian navies from time to time. Throughout the campaign, it is seen that both British and Axis could only control Central Mediterranean intermittently, whenever additional forces (air and naval) were made available.

The composition of opposing forces in the Mediterranean at start of hostilities was as below:-

Major Warships/ Submarines	Axis Forces (Italian/German)	Allied Forces
Battleships	6	9
Carriers	-	1
Cruisers	21	23
Destroyers	52	65
Submarines	106	46
Total	185	144

While talking about the belligerents' strength and weaknesses, it is pertinent to mention that British Base at Malta, due to its strategic location, was of supreme importance for offensive operations against Italian Sea Lines of communication to Libya and also for protection of British SLOCs. Exposed position of Malta made it very likely that the Italians would attempt its early capture. Italians by virtue of their central position could generate superior Force in the area of their choice. On the other hand British could attack from two directions, i.e. from east and from west. Italian Navy enjoyed numerical superiority in Mediterranean. Then the Italian SLOCs to North Africa were short and passed directly south. However, British SLOCs were long and were more vulnerable especially in the central Mediterranean. Italian ships were relatively newer, faster and had superior calibre and extended gun ranges. Availability of aircraft carrier and radar with British Navy gave them technological edge over Italian Navy. British were well trained, battle hardened, with high morale and confident of their superiority. Whereas, Italian navy and air force were poorly trained both in independent and joint operations at sea.

The Mediterranean has remained a highway for the commerce by merchants trading for centuries. Its geo-strategic location makes it a strategically vital sea for countries inside as well as outside the Mediterranean. Control of its islands, coasts, and trade routes were vital during both World Wars. Shipping route through Mediterranean is much shorter than route around Cape of Good Hope. Mediterranean Sea, strategically located between the Europe and Africa, became a vital theatre of operations for the desert war in North Africa. All the supplies of Axis and majority of those of Allied had to pass through the Mediterranean to reach their respective land

forces in North Africa. Hence, security of SLOCs figured prominently right at the outset. The maritime strategy in the Mediterranean revolved around commerce warfare with one power trying to deliver supplies to its army in the desert, while the other aiming to deny it. Britain and France controlled Gibraltar at the narrow entrance from the Atlantic. Italy stood astride the central basin with Sardinia and Sicily to the north and Libya to the south. Mediterranean provided the shortest route to European and US bound trade with Asia and Far East through the straits of Gibraltar on one side and Suez Canal at the other. The British traditionally considered the Mediterranean her lifeline to the Suez Canal and its routes to India, Middle East and the Far East. France considered it high roads to her colonies in Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco. For Italy, it had been the lifeline, as 99% of her trade passed through Mediterranean.

Sustenance of SLOCs was the most important factor that influenced the outcome of North African campaign. The naval operations in the Mediterranean were carried out either to guard the SLOCs, or to deny the same to the enemy in support of the land campaign in the desert. The key to the success rested in keeping the SLOCs open. British Commonwealth forces in the desert received many of their reinforcements, equipment and supplies through the Red Sea and the Suez Canal. They could either use the Mediterranean to reach their bases in Egypt or use a longer route around the Cape of Good Hope when threatened by Axis air and submarines. Thus dependence of Britain on SLOCs was virtually a matter of survival. War on land has its own dynamics and so does the war at sea. If the progress of the war at sea is out of pace with the land war, the ability to influence the land war diminishes. This is evident from the fact that between February and May

1941 The German Afrika Korps was lifted to North Africa and Axis were sufficiently stocked. This enabled Rommel to attack and recapture the whole of Cyrenaica, marking the first offensive. The stores accumulated up to mid 1941 through SLOCs were expended and the increasing success of the British sea denial campaign forced a stalemate in the land war. By the end of 1941, the German 2nd Air Fleet, which had been withdrawn for the Russian offensive, was redeployed in the Mediterranean. Superior air power suppressed the naval sea denial campaign in the first half of 1942 to the extent that the axis tonnage lifted into North Africa increased significantly. This was the primary reason that Rommel was able to launch his second offensive to capture Tobruk and attack Alam Halfa. After this Allies once again interdicted Axis SLOCs but their own supplies around the Cape had increased manifold.

**Operation "Hercules"- Capture of Malta.** Malta was a British Island in the Mediterranean, which played a crucial role for British air and sea operations against the supply convoys for Axis forces fighting in the Western Desert and subsequently in the North Africa campaign. The Island's strategic importance lay in its geographical location. It was in centre of Mediterranean at a distance of 60 nautical miles from Sicily and 1,000 nautical miles from Alexandria. This tiny island had been the only British sea-air base available between Gibraltar and Alexandria. Malta emerged as the most significant piece of land in North African campaign. Both sides made best efforts to gain control of Malta. Its strength had direct bearing on outcome of different phases of the battle. To the Allies, Malta and Force K, the submarine and surface fleet based at Malta were absolutely necessary and indeed decisive in preventing the Axis convoys from reaching North Africa.



It was an ideal launching pad for air and sea strikes against ships carrying POL and supplies for the Italian and German forces in North Africa. From June 1940 to the end of 1944, the famous 10th submarine Flotilla of Allies sank one Million tons of shipping in the Mediterranean theatre, three cruisers, over 30 destroyers, torpedo boats and German and Italian submarines. This severely hindered German land forces effectiveness in North Africa. Meanwhile, British supplies went around the Cape of Good Hope, through the Red Sea and the Suez Canal to Egypt. The reduction of Malta to impotence, or better still its capture, was the key objective of the Axis forces to provide security to her SLOCs, whereas the Allied were determined not to allow Malta to fall without a battle. During the entire campaign, Malta acting as offensive base for the Allies, accounted for 2/3rd of shipping losses for the Axis.

Mussolini was convinced that the only hope to save the Axis land forces in Africa was to capture Malta. In the spring of 1942, Germany and Italy agreed to either capture or neutralize Malta. They developed the plan for invasion of Malta, called Operation HERCULES. Malta was heavily bombarded, creating colossal damages to Allied forces/facilities there. On 10th May Field-Marshal Von Kesselring, having visited the African front, reported to Hitler that Malta had been neutralized as a naval and air base and SLOCs were relatively safe. Hitler considered the invasion to be unwarranted and convinced Mussolini to hold off the invasion. Resultantly Luftwaffe fleet stationed at Sicily was moved to Greece and part of Fourth Air Fleet was moved for Operation Barbarossa. This appreciation proved premature and the error of diverting Luftwaffe units to eastern theatres proved very expensive for the Axis.

The struggle between Allies and Axis in North Africa was like a see-saw and was a direct result of logistics received by the opposing commanders. Italians offensive into Egyptian territory up to Sidi Barani in 1940 came to a halt due to lack of supplies. Italian supply situation became precarious as the Royal Navy began to sever the Italian SLOCs through attacks on Benghazi, Bardia, Sollum and Sidi Barani. After receiving reinforcements General Wavell started his offensive against Italian defensive positions at Sidi Barani in December 1940. He launched offensive with fully motorized forces and defeated Italians by February 1941. As a result Tobruk fell to Allies. When Rommel arrived in North Africa he had enough logistic support to push back British forces but as the supplies dwindled and could not be replenished subsequently his advance also halted. For ease of understanding the impact of logistic support, during Rommel's campaign in North Africa from February 1941 to March 1943, can be divided into four distinct phases (**Map-22**).

*Phase 1 - Axis First Offensive.* Rommel pushed British forces about 1500 Miles from their positions in EL- Agheila till Egyptian border. But the German supplies could not keep up with the Blitzkrieg advance of German Panzers which reached Sollum, as these remained under constant air strikes. Rommel organised small coastal ships to transfer supplies from Tripoli to its forward localities but by then Allies had caused considerable losses to Axis at sea. By November 41, Rommel could only receive 40,000 tons out of 120,000 tons of supplies due to severance of SLOCs.

*Phase 2 - Allied Counter Offensive.* In later part of 1941, Allies received sufficient supplies to launch Operation Crusader due to strengthening of Malta, whereas, Axis forces could not receive required reinforcements because

of colossal shipping losses. The British forces managed to push back Rommel to Al Algeila line. Tobruk was relieved after siege of eight months. Thus Hitler took few significant steps. After realizing the criticality of supplies across the Mediterranean which threatened the whole North African Campaign, Hitler ordered to send U-Boats to Mediterranean in August 1941. Their major contributions to the land battle in North Africa were attacks on Allied lines of communication. In view of the precarious supply situation and vulnerability of Axis SLOCs, Germany decided to bring back the Luftwaffe units (Second Air Fleet) from Russia to Sicily. In December 1941, Hitler sent Field Marshal Kesselring to Italy as C-in-C South with orders to secure SLOCs and achieve favourable air situation in the Sicilian Channel. German air formations now provided protection to convoys bringing supplies to Panzer Corps of Africa. The German air offensive on Malta gave the Axis an upper hand and again secured their SLOCs from Italy to North Africa. Battleships now escorted their convoys. During February and March, 67,000 tons of supplies and 40,000 tons of POL arrived in Libya, only nine percent having been lost by submarine attack en route. During April and May, twenty six Axis convoys passed through the Mediterranean without any loss.

*Phase 3 - Axis Second Offensive.* Rommel was by now sufficiently provisioned through secured SLOCs which enabled him to turn around and renew his offensive with lightening speed. By end January 1942, he captured Cyrenaica, successfully completed battle of Ghazala from 26 May – 6 June, defeated 8th Army and captured Tobruk. He reached El-Alamein only 60 miles from Alexandria.

*Phase 4 - Axis Final Retreat* During this phase Hitler was experiencing very tough resistance as he was not able to capture Moscow and diverted all the supplies to

Operation Barbarossa. Rommel at this critical juncture of North African campaign could not get the required supplies. On the other hand British having secured their SLOCs improved the relative strength in the theatre. General Montgomery with overwhelming superiority in numbers and equipment forced final Axis retreat to Tunisia and ultimately out of Africa.

## *CHAPTER - II*

### **BATTLE OF GHAZALA**

The North African Campaign was distinct from the rest of the 2nd World War. Though numerous battles were waged, Ghazala remains a classic. It was Rommel's masterpiece and reflection of his operational art. The main effect of Ghazala was that, it had created a window of strategic opportunity for Germany. This was infact the last chance to seize Egypt and destroy British forces in the Middle East besides the chances of threatening Russia from south. Had Ghazala been capitalized upon, Germany's strategic environment could have radically improved. However, British victory at El Alamein and Allied landings (Operation Torch) at Morocco spelt the ruin of Axis power in North Africa.

The prevalent geostrategic environment at the start of Battle of Ghazala was significant. Marshal Graziani, commander of the Italian Army in Libya, launched the offensive of Italian 10th Army into Egypt on 13 Sep 1940 and advanced 60 miles into the Egyptian territory at Sidi Barrani. Here the offensive came to a prolonged halt primarily due to poor state of communication, lack of water and shortage of transport. Graziani declined to continue the offensive any further until his supply problems had been solved. After having received necessary reinforcements, General O' Connor started his offensive against Italian defensive positions at Sidi Barani on 6 December 1940. British forces were able to defeat the Italian Army by 7

February 1941 resulting into near collapse of the Italian hold on North Africa. The Allies captured Tobruk, forced the Italians out of Cyrenaica and occupied El-Agheila.

On 29 January 1941, Churchill accepted the request of Greece for help in the face of impending German invasion. He had directed General Wavel, in February 1941, when he was in a commanding position, to attack and capture Tripoli. He was also ordered to "leave only a minimum force to hold Cyrenaica and send the largest possible force to Greece. Wavel's plea to be allowed for a quick run over to Tripoli was rejected by Churchill on 13 February 1941, i.e. just a day after Rommel landed in North Africa to aid Mussolini's forces. The orders were implemented and required numbers of troops were dispatched to Greece. On 16 April 1941, Germany invaded Greece. During the retreat, British left behind all their tanks, most of their equipment and over 12,000 men surrendered to Germans. Seeing the Italians on the verge of being thrown out of Libya, Germany came to the rescue of the weaker ally. Hitler on 11 January in his Directive 21 instructed, "The situation in Mediterranean makes it necessary to provide German assistance on strategic, political and psychological grounds to Italy. Tripolitania must be held". Thereafter, Rommel arrived in North Africa with his Panzer Army on 12 February for Italian support. In order to ensure constant inflow of men and material from Britain around the Cape of Good Hope, a longer alternative supply route was secured by capturing the naval facilities at Madagascar in May 1942 by British Naval Forces through Operation Iron Clad.

### **Operational Environment and Strategies**

Preparations for an offensive remained under way by Allies forces from late 1941 till early May 1942.

Throughout this period, forward dumps were established and a railway line was also pushed forward. Belhamed and Ghazala areas were developed both as a springboard for the offensive as well as for the defense of Tobruk and Eastern Cyrenaica. On 19 May 1942, Auchinleck decided to go in for the offensive with the primary aim of destruction of Axis forces and not for mere distraction from Malta. By now, due to domination of Mediterranean and neutralization of Malta, Rommel was sufficiently stocked with logistics to undertake his second offensive. He thus acted faster and launched his offensive one week prior to the British. He ordered Axis forces to launch a pre-emptive offensive, and after having broken through Ghazala defensive line, destroy maximum enemy armour in the process to facilitate capture of Tobruk. His main aims included the destruction of 8th Army and capture of Egypt. Axis operational Centres of gravity were the Panzer/Motorized Formations. It could be derived that Rommel was a great exponent of combining superior relative strength with speed of operations to aim at rapid reduction of the enemy, as he himself says in Rommel Papers, In motorized warfare, material attrition and destruction of the organic cohesion of the opposing army, must be the immediate aim of all planning. Tactically the battle of attrition is fought with highest mobility and the main endeavour should be to concentrate one's own forces in space and time. Speed is everything. The enemy must never be allowed to reorganize. The war of attrition against the enemy's armour must be waged, as far as possible, by the tank destruction units. One's own armour should be only used to deal the final blow.

On 4 February 1942, Auchinleck issued a directive, on which the plans of the 8th Army's future operations were based. Main points were: Hold the enemy as far West

of Tobruk as possible, without risking defeat in detail; organize a striking force, with the aim of destroying enemy forces and occupying Cyrenaica at the earliest; and avoid own forces being invested in Tobruk in the event of withdrawal towards East. Auchinleck's prime objectives were the destruction of enemy forces and occupation of Cyrenaica for eventual expulsion of enemy forces from Libya. 8th Army was the Allies Operational Centre of gravity. Since defensive positions could be easily out-flanked due to desert terrain, lack of natural obstacles and availability of Armoured formations, therefore Allied defence was to be based on a series of 'boxes' fortified, mined, wired and heavily stocked. These boxes were to stay even if by-passed. The Axis could neither leave such positions unsecured across his line of communication, nor could he attempt their reduction without accepting delay and suffering heavy casualties. While the 'boxes' had their own infantry, artillery and support elements, armour was to be kept outside the 'boxes' as reserve for necessary employment preferably as armoured divisions for increased effect and to avoid defeat in detail.

North African battle ground staying south of Mediterranean, stretched 600 miles in length and at places up to 100 miles in width between Tripoli in the west and Alexandria in the East. In between there were important communication centres like Al Agheila, Benghazi, Ghazala, Tobruk and El Alemien. The Western Libya was known as Tripolitania with reference to Tripoli whereas Eastern Libya was called Cyrenaica with reference to the ancient and historical city of Cyrene. Being a desert, the theatre of operations was devoid of any worthwhile infrastructure, especially roads and tracks were much needed to maintain large motorized and armoured formations operating from both sides. Belligerents were dependent on the only



metalled road (via Balbia), running along the coast line. Apart from the above a few desert tracks also existed including Trigh kapuzzo astride where most of the battle of Ghazala was fought.

General Auchinleck was sure about impending Axis offensive. He visualized main effort on a narrow front against the centre of defensive position with the aim of driving straight to Tobruk. This could be achieved by feinting against southern flank with the aim of drawing British armour to the south to facilitate the main. And main effort in the south of Bir Hachiem, was to wheel to North to seize Tobruk, complemented by a secondary effort against northern flank. Amphibious forces of a battalion size might cut allied routes of withdrawal between Ghazala and Tobruk. So Ghazala delaying line was to be developed into a formidable defensive line to halt enemy's offensive towards Tobruk. Tobruk was to act as pivot of manoeuvre for planned offensive against Rommel forces in Cyrenaica. Auchinleck plan was: To be kept in the north and centre. 8th Army defences were to be based on a strong defensive line, south of Ghazala, consisting of a series of strong fortified boxes. These boxes were to be further reinforced by interlinked layers of minefields. Mobile reserves were to be kept in the centre and south.

On the other hand, Rommel's design of operations was to achieve superior relative strength, exploiting time and space bondage aimed at rapid destruction of enemy mechanized forces. Adopting indirect approach to exploit the enemy's vulnerability of fixed defences, Rommel expected Allied forces disposed on Ghazala defence line as under:-

- Main defensive effort in the Centre and North.
- Auxiliary defensive effort in the South.

- Reserves centrally placed astride Trigh Kupuzzo.
- Reinforcements expected from Tobruk Garrison.

His plan envisaged that 1 and 21 Italian Corps would be employed opposite 50th British and 1st South African Divisions, with the aim of drawing British Armour formations northwards. After having attracted Allied armour towards north, main effort would be launched with armoured and motorised formations from south of Bir Hachiem in an outflanking maneuver. And this push would continue on to the coast, by cutting off and destroying 8th Army. These maneuvers were to be completed in four days.

### **Conduct Phases**

*Phase - I (26 - 29 May 1942).* At 1400 hours on 26 May, Italian Infantry under General Cruewell launched a frontal attack on Ghazala line, in the northern and central sectors. In order to reinforce the British perception that the main effort is against Ghazala Line, the Africa Corps, 90th Light and Italian Ariete Divisions also assembled behind Cruewell group. After deceiving British by the initial assembly behind Cruewell group in the north, they raced to their actual assembly areas in the south after last light. At 2030 hours, the striking force executed outflanking manoeuvre from South of Bir Hachiem (**Map-23**). The progress of operation was that 90th Light Division operating on outer side of the pincer skirted around Retma box and ended up at El Adem cross road. In this manoeuvre Headquarters of 7 Armoured Division was overrun. In the center an Armoured and a Motorized brigade counter attacked but were almost put out of action by 15 and 21 Panzer Divisions. 1st Armoured Division (with two brigades) counter attacked West and East of Knightsbridge Crossing, but the Africa Corps

managed to reach eight miles South of Acroma. The Axis thrust, however, was unsuccessful in isolating the Ghazala Line (**Map-24**). 90th Light Division had swung far too much to East and had become highly vulnerable. The wheel borne supplies were slow and could not match the speed of advance of the Panzers and 90 Light. They were being constantly attacked enroute constraining Africa Corps in use of petrol and ammunition. On 29 May, realizing the situation, Rommel decided to reduce front and conducted a limited withdrawal to Bir el Harmat. In essence executing a change of posture from the offensive to temporary defensive. This defensive position later on came to be known more famously as the "Cauldron".

*Phase - II: Battle of Cauldron (30 May - 10 June 1942).* German - Italian Divisions organized the Cauldron as a strong anti tank screen with tanks providing depth. The dispositions inside Cauldron were: 15th Panzer Division in the immediate south west of Sidi Muftah, 21st Panzer Division along Sidra Ridge, Ariet Division along Asiagh Ridge, and 90th Light Division west of Bir el Harmat. On 1st June, the Axis hit against 150 Brigade "Box" in the rear and eliminated it the same day, thus linking up with Cruewell Group. Resultantly, linkup was established with Cruewell Group, thus opening a safe supply route through enemy minefields.

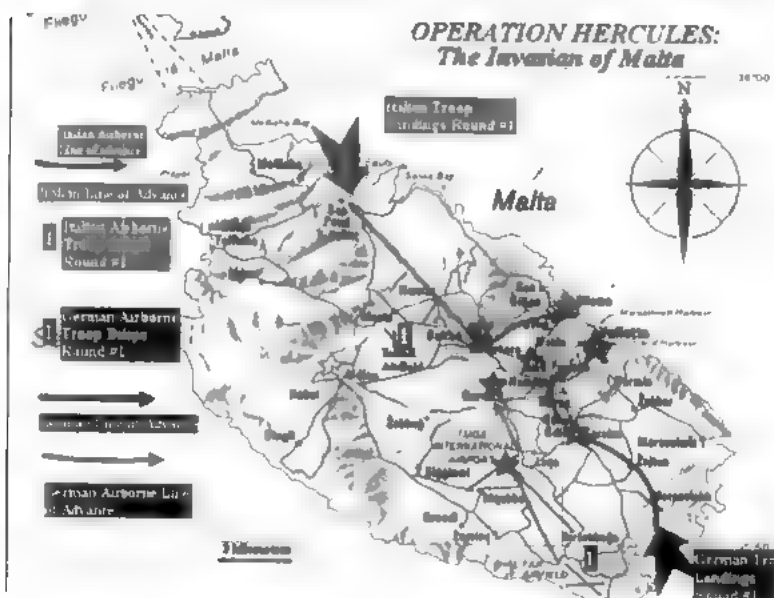
In British counter actions, few options were considered. *Option 1:* They planned to launch a strong attack from the Northern Sector of Ghazala line by 5th Indian Infantry Division piercing the front held by Cruewell Group with a view to reach Bir Temrad, thereby cutting off Panzer Army communications and force Rommel to recoil. This was considered to be a casualty intensive operation with little chances of success and Rommel would still retain the option of breaking out towards north to cut

Allied communications. *Option 2* suggested a double envelopment of the Cauldron with a view to destroy Axis forces in Cauldron. 1st and 7th Armoured Divisions with the 5th Indian Infantry Division to pass through Bir Hachiem and attack the Cauldron from the rear. 2nd South African Division, 10th Indian Infantry Division and 32nd Army Tank Brigade were to attack from the north. It would leave Rommel with couple of counter actions:-

- Could also cut off 30 Corps.
- Forces containing Cauldron being weak, could be penetrated by Rommel, thus developing a thrust towards Belhamed (a supply base). This would result in cutting off the 8th Army from its supplies.

Finally, the adopted option (*Option 3*), codenamed 'Operation Aberdeen' was aimed at the destruction of Axis forces in the Cauldron. The plan was based on a converging attack on Cauldron from north and east by formations under command 13th Corps and 30th Corps. From North, 32nd Army Tank Brigade had to attack Sidra Ridge (21 Panzer Division), maintaining contact and pressure, as per the emerging situation. Operations were planned to be under command 30 Corps. Eastern prong operation was under over all command of 13 Corps, and to be conducted in three phases. Initially, Indian Infantry Brigade with an armour regiment was to breach Ariet positions on Aslagh Ridge in the center, under command 5th Indian Infantry Division. Secondly, 22nd Armoured Brigade ex 7 Armoured Division was to pass through the breach and capture area Sidi Muftah. 7th Armoured Division had to command the Operation. Thirdly, under the command of 5th Indian Infantry Division, 9th Indian Infantry Brigade was envisaged to follow up and consolidate the area secured by 22nd Armoured Brigade.

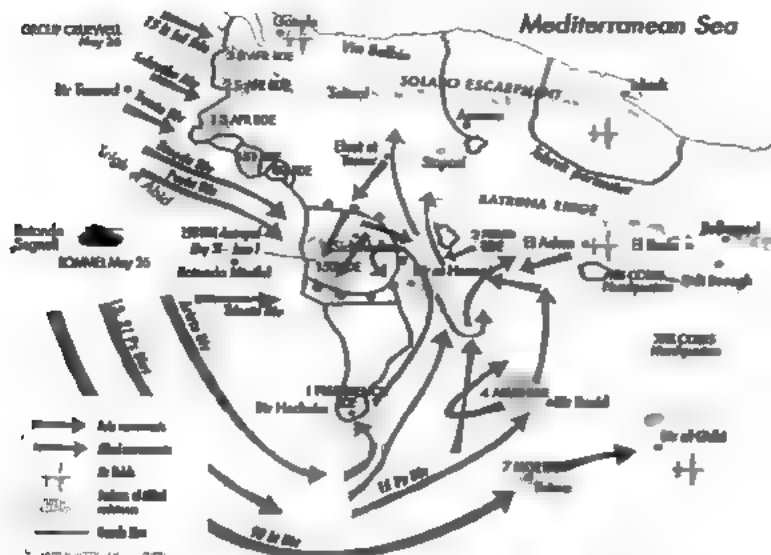
### Map 22: Operation Hercules - The Malta Invasion



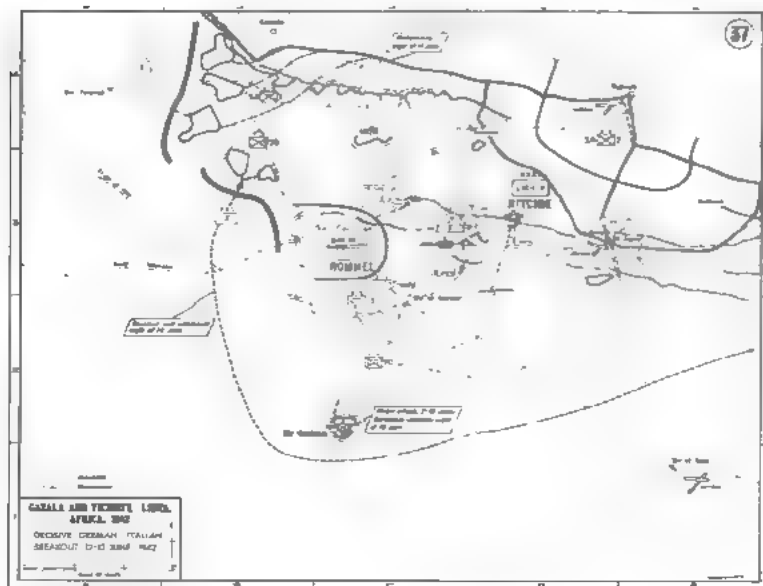
### Map 23: Battle of Bir Hakeim



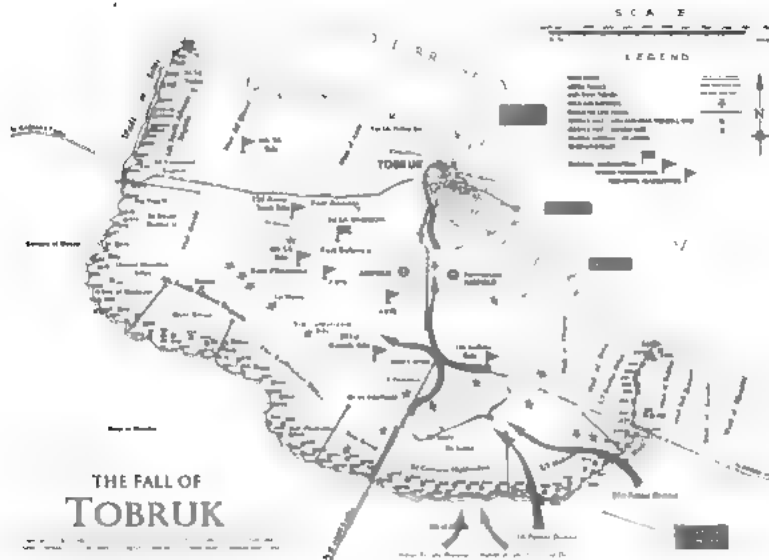
**Map 24: The Myth of Successful Defensive Line**



**Map 25: Operations in Egypt and Libya  
(12-13 June 1942)**



### Map 26: Tobruk 1942



### Map 27: The African Experience - Rommel and the Deutsche Afrika Korp 1941 - 1942



### Map 28: Gazala and Vicinity Libya North Africa 1942





## *CHAPTER - III*

### **ANALYSIS / LESSONS**

The analysis of North African Campaign reveals that maintenance of logistics and supplies was critical for operation on land, since the theatre was at a considerable distance from both Allies and Axis. Sustenance of SLOCs and logistics was the most important factor that influenced the outcome of North African campaign. Malta played a crucial role for British air and sea operations against the convoys supplying Axis forces fighting in the desert. Dominating Malta was key to strength of belligerents. Whenever the island was strongly held by Allies, delivery of Axis stores dropped considerably. Whenever it was effectively dominated by Axis, supplies got through and their forces were able to undertake offensives in the North African desert. The Battle of Ghazala opened with the overall relative strength situation distinctly in favour of the Allies, who also enjoyed the defender's advantage. When it ended, the Allies had been decisively defeated. Rommel displayed brilliant generalship, always prepared to take risks. Allied displayed serious and fundamental errors of conception and execution.

On the other hand, Rommel also had his shortcomings and had it not been for the incompetence of British, Rommel would have been decisively and finally defeated in this very battle. He came very near to being defeated in detail, as a result of his over ambitious and almost reckless thrust of El Adem and Acroma, which resulted in

acute dilution of his forces (**Map-27**). Rommel however saved the situation by effecting a perfectly executed change of posture, from offensive to defensive. The Allies missed the opportunity to destroy his forces at this critical stage of disengagement and retraction. This battle, which General Tucker describes as “one of the worst fought battles in the history of the British Army”, merits in-depth and critical analysis.

Not having the resources available to fight on the continent, Britain pursued an indirect policy that would buy time and weaken the enemy. Conversely, it can be argued that Hitler failed to appreciate the importance of North Africa and incorrectly focused his strategy towards Moscow. German strategy was primarily to help Italian forces. Therefore, North African Theatre was, given secondary importance as compared with their priorities for Operation Barbarossa. On the other hand British high command gave supreme importance to North African theatre as it was rightly considered to be the life line with Middle East, South Asia and Far East. The decision to assist Greece was a strategic mistake. Churchill, instead of pursuing the campaign objective deployed a large number of Wavell's troops to Greece thus weakening British forces in North Africa in spring 1941. This strategic error changed the future course of the war and allowed the Axis forces to consolidate their positions in North Africa. Rommel was therefore able to enter the theatre of operations and subsequently receive required reinforcements for Operation Venezia.

*Identification/ domination of key areas.* Retention of Malta as a secondary base in Zone of operations was a decisive factor in the North African Campaign. It was the successful protection of Malta by allies which enabled them to generate maximum offensive air and naval operations

thus diminishing the chances of Axis to win the desert war. Of all the losses, Malta could be credited with 2/3rd of the losses. Had Axis powers captured Malta in the beginning of the war, it would have been a severe blow for the Allies. Their offensive capability in the Mediterranean would have been significantly weakened, whilst the Axis convoys would have more successfully made to North African shores.

*Disharmony in policy and strategy.* Policy should dominate strategy, however, needs of strategy must be catered in policy planning. Axis military strategy was in line with their policy. Allied policy contrarily demanded an early British offensive, whereas, on ground military strategy required more time for building up relative strength, especially in mechanized component. Therefore, an early offensive was difficult. This differential in policy and strategy caused British defeat at Ghazala defensive line.

*Criticality of supplies and logistics* Since the theatre was at a considerable distance for both Allies and Axis, the maintenance of logistics and supplies was critical for operation on land. The supplies had to be delivered to North Africa via Mediterranean. The SLOCs of both the belligerents were under constant threat from surface/subsurface vessels and Air force. Africa Corps constantly relied upon supplies from main land through Mediterranean for essential POL and equipment ranging from tanks and guns all the way down to food and uniforms. Vulnerability at sea and long distances in the desert added further complexities to the logistics. Africa Corps was severely handicapped by the fact that supplies dictated their strategy and progress of operations at critical stages of the campaign.

*Significance of air in maritime operations.* When the Luftwaffe withdrew much of its Mediterranean force for the Russian campaign in mid 1941, German and Italian shipping losses increased manifold as British planes, surface and subsurface vessels were able to interdict from Malta and North African bases. Conversely, when in November 1941, the Luftwaffe was reinforced and German submarines sent to the Mediterranean, supplies to Rommel got through and the British Crusader advance was reversed. When Force K at Malta had been practically neutralized by the Luftwaffe, Rommel received his supplies and more importantly his Armour, and was thus able to take the 8th Army by surprise at Ghazala in May 1942.

*Absence of maritime surveillance.* Italians lacked proficiency in Maritime surveillance and failed to locate Allied ships operating in the Mediterranean. As a result they had to suffer heavy losses at the hands of Royal Navy which surprised them on a number of occasions. Similarly the Italian Navy failed to avail the opportunities of attacking British ships.

*Design of operation.* As far as Axis design of operation was concerned, Rommel correctly visualized the main defensive positions of Allies which resulted in his ultimate victory in the Battle of Ghazala. Their fortified defences with dense minefields could have embroiled him for longer duration and caused substantial attrition on his Panzer Divisions thus decreasing relative strength. Rommel's decision to exploit vast spaces in desert through wide manoeuvres from the south of Bir Hachem unhinged Allied defences, enveloped the infantry in static defences, reaching in the enemy's operational depth and severing lines of communication. Defence is a prelude to offense. Whereas the Allied defences at Ghazala were fixed wherein critical spaces/ pivot of manoeuvres were neither

identified nor arrangements made to protect them, the static nature of the defensive positions in the desert and absence of superior design of battle was evident from the following:-

- Two third of 8th Army was tied to defences and force maintenance.
- There were 15-20 miles gaps between boxes, through these gaps the defences could be sliced anywhere.
- Defences were vulnerable to outflanking from South and inviting to be surprised.

*Operational cycle.* It entailed contingency planning, reconnaissance, rehearsals and coordination. Besides persuasion of Auchinleck, when Rommel had halted on 30 May, owing to his over conscious approach in protecting supply dumps General Ritchie did not go over to counter offensive with 30th Corps to complete defensive operational cycle.

*Contingency planning.* There was no contingency planning done by the Allies to respond to Axis envelopment manoeuvre from south, failure of counter attack at Cauldron, and to avert encirclement in case Rommel executed a breakout from Cauldron.

*Security of manoeuvre.* Rommel's divisions were tasked to operate widely dispersed; his both flanks, i.e. Ariete Division on the left and 90th Light Division on the right did not provide flank security to the two Panzer Divisions. As a result, British units kept on destroying the supporting echelons of Africa Corps. Rommel was lucky to have successfully contracted the front. Hence, while conceiving the plan security of manoeuvre its security was not considered.

*Centre of gravity.* Rommel's centre of gravity existed in his mechanized component, which he would employ boldly in the vast spaces of desert to achieve decisive results. More so, it was endemic in Rommel's nature to secure victory through outflanking manoeuvres and had adopted this technique to reach Ghazala line. The Allies failed to correctly identify this and did not make focused efforts to destroy it.

*Lack of intelligence.* Allies also failed to identify the assemblies and subsequent manoeuvre of Axis mechanised formations from the south. Similarly Axis could not correctly locate Allies reserves which ultimately affected the achievement of objective in visualised time frame. Had the belligerents obtained correct intelligence and timely information about the enemy capability, the result could have been much different.

*Failure to identify/ exploit enemy weaknesses.* Rommel's principal weakness was ill equipped and ill trained Italians in the north. Allies failed to identify it. Had they attacked them while containing Rommel's left prong he would have been forced to recoil to assist Italians and protect his lines of communications.

*Resistance capacity vs ambitious planning.* Rommel failed to visualize allied resistance capacity, which was strengthened by the terrain friction. He intended to destroy 8th Army by dislocation and paralysis. The plan of envelopment manoeuvre from south to reach coast road, in four days without sufficient knowledge of Allies deployment clearly shows Rommel's ambitiousness.

*Approach.* Axis forces in the first and the last phases of Battle of Ghazala adopted indirect approach. In the first phase, Rommel's Afrika Corps and especially 90 Light

Division reached at the rear of the enemy using outflanking manoeuvre from the south of Ghazala defensive line causing dislocation in enemy's system of forces. In the last phase also Axis forces reached Tobruk using the same approach. Allied did not resort to indirect approach in any phase of the battle. In the final stages of the battle, Allies instead of breaking contact and consolidating continued pressing southwards to destroy enemy's armour. Had they consolidated at this stage and then attacked using manoeuvre, instead of reinforcing the failure, the result could have been different. Use of indirect approach by Axis helped them achieve victory in this battle.

*TSR matrix.* The splitting and positioning of reserves did not facilitate concentration and achieving superior relative strength ratio at decisive point, and time. Most of the armoured brigades were late and attacked by Panzer Divisions while in assembly. A line of defence at line Acroma - Al Adem - Bel Hamed existed to offer a continuous front and gain a superior relative strength ratio, with a view to forcing Rommel to fight another prepared line of defence. Using this as an anvil, armoured divisions could have been employed to deliver a counter stroke.

*Surprise and deception.* At Battle of Ghazala, Rommel, in order to deceive Allies, undertook skilful initial assemblies in the north. He then shifted his Afrika Corps down south and launched his main effort from the least expected and least resisted direction. Thus the cohesion and balance of Allied forces was seriously disturbed and they could not retrieve this imbalance till the end of the battle.

*Mental mobility/ flexibility.* On the second day of operation, Rommel had realized that because of ambitious

planning and shortage of ammunition and POL, he is likely to reach his culminating point soon. Anticipating operation ahead and in order to achieve his final objective, he decided to change his posture and went into Cauldron. This decision enabled his forces to improve their logistics and achieve their final objective.

*Employment of armour.* Military analysts clearly assign British defeat to the piecemeal employment of mechanised component not as a command error but that of a concept which was almost formalized, by that point in time, by Auchinleck. By the time, Churchill was urging him to go on offensive he had already instituted a thought in 8th Army that Armoured Division be reorganized into brigade groups and on ground the brigades had been allocated their supporting echelons to operate independently. At the last moment urging Ritchie and Norrie, Commander 30th Corps to employ Armoured Divisions as such was bound to yield negative results. Concepts take time to mature; this aspect was lost sight of.

*Articulation of command.* Axis forces were well articulated throughout the North African campaign. On the other hand allied did not pay due attention to this aspect and faced difficulties in employing their forces in various phases of the campaign specially Operation Aberdeen. The command was to alternate between 13th and 30th corps depending upon the formation engaged in the manoeuvre which was against the principle of unity of command. Axis defeated the Allies due to better articulation of command.

*Command differential.* British commanders when compared with the dynamism of Rommel and his ability to command from front lacked the desired charisma and dynamism. Had General Ritchie or Auchinleck commanded



from front, the outcome might have been different. More so, command articulation for "Operation Aberdeen" was strange and against the principle of unity of command. The command was to alternate between 13th and 30th Corps depending upon the formation engaged in manoeuvre.

*Logistics.* Rommel had planned and carried four days of logistics with him but owing to intense battle, they were exhausted in 24 hours, while British units in very brave actions hunted the supply columns, thereby, hastening the culmination point of Rommel's main effort. Rommel had actually planned to capture vast amount of supplies stored at Bel Hamed and Tobruk, but could not lay his hands on them since his main effort was stalled much short of the decisive objective.

*Application of notions of operational strategy.* Both Allies and Axis Operational centre of gravity was the armoured formations. Rommel wanted to exploit the inherent mobility and shock action of his Panzer Divisions to the fullest by employing them into wide manoeuvres in the vast spaces of desert to achieve decisive results. Whereas, Allied Armoured divisions were put into battle pre-maturely and piecemeal. They could not ensure safety of their armoured punch, hence their centre of gravity remained vulnerable and was destroyed by Rommel, which resulted in dislocation of Allied forces. Correct identification and neutralisation of centre of gravity of Allies by Axis helped them to achieve their objective.

Defender aims at hastening the culminating point of attacker, whereas, attacker tries to induce critical imbalance in the defender's system of forces. In the Battle of Ghazala, Rommel induced critical imbalance in Allies forces. Resultantly, they failed to resist and withdrew to Tobruk. Rommel due to his ambitious planning had

reached his culminating point on the second day as it was out of POL and ammunition, an ideal target for isolation and destruction, but luckily it was not exploited by Allies. Rommel launched his entire armoured formations from the south and had kept no reserves for crucial phases of the battle, hence was relatively imbalanced in the initial stages of the battle. Likewise Commander 8th Army deployed his forces in a manner whereby he though had sufficient reserves available behind Ghazala defensive line, could not make best use of those (due to the problem of articulation of command, distant dispositions and incorrect hypothization). Hence Allied overall system of forces remained imbalanced.

### **Lessons**

The North African campaign has left behind a legacy of lessons learnt in strategic thinking as well as theater and operational war fighting. Some of the pertinent lessons are given in succeeding paras.

The development of naval air arm and its integration with the navy brought a revolutionary change in the ways naval operations were conducted during the Mediterranean Campaign. In the modern warfare scenario, the air – sea cooperation has become indispensable. Sea-air cooperation has to be of the highest standard to ensure success of naval operations. The submarines played havoc with supply convoys passing through the Mediterranean for both Axis and Allies shipping. They are particularly very effective offensive weapon system, in tropical operating environment and are likely to play a dominant role in any future conflict. More submarines are required to disrupt adversaries' SLOCs, offensive deployment closer to their coast and defensive deployment at choke points. Air plays key role in the open deserts, hence all components of

defence should be backed by State of Art aerial platforms for information seeking / air support and interdiction of enemy forces.

Defensive positions in the desert are prone to outflanking / penetration as no amount of mine field can deter it, hence requirement of strong mobile reserves arises to deal with enemy out flanking manoeuvres in our desert sectors. In desert one of the flank of the defences must rest on an effective obstacle. In case a formidable obstacle is not available, the defence should have inbuilt strength through compactness and balanced grouping of forces. Extended frontages should be avoided at all cost. Strong mobile reserves must be kept to take care of weakness of wide frontages and open flanks. Deserts are excellent for mobile warfare, therefore, effort should be made to hold important geographical features in strength as pivots of manoeuvre to be used by the mobile elements at the opportune time. As concealment in desert is difficult, therefore, heavy reliance has to be placed on deception measures and specially in case of an offensive, assemblies must be intelligently orchestrated.

Finally, mechanized troops should never be employed in static role, rather they should be employed in concentrated form against enemy penetration / outflanking manoeuvres. Minefields must be laid in depth and also axially to prevent outflanking as well as to gain time for readjustments of defences. They must be covered by fire and kept under surveillance round the clock. The critical importance of logistics has been amply highlighted during the North African Campaign and similarly it is extremely important for us to improve sustainable logistics especially in the desert.

## Conclusion

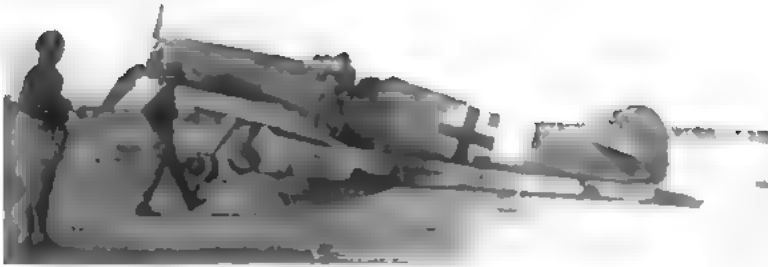
In the 2nd World War Germany joined the North African Theatre to help her Ally Italy as she had no strategic objective in the theatre to pursue **(Map-28)**. Consequently, theatre was not accorded high priority and Rommel was not provided required supplies. Had, Axis gained control of Middle East oil fields their requirement of POL would have been met to boost their falling war industry. Moreover, Malta was not taken which kept interdicting effectively the Axis SLOCs in Mediterranean. These strategic errors were major causes of defeat of the Axis. Although, the Allies joined the Battle of Ghazala with clear cut superiority but ended up thoroughly mauled, disorganized and demoralized. At the time of Battle of Ghazala, Rommel became a hero for the 8th Army troops who were fighting against him. His great Generalship, produced victory despite problem of supplies and inferior Italian Allies. He revealed various facets of mobile warfare to the world in vast stretches of the North African desert leaving important lessons for the students of operational strategy.



Captured Matilda, Bir Hakeim, Battle of Gazala.



The famous German 8.8cm anti-aircraft gun fires against enemy targets during the Battle of Gazala.



German air preparing for the battle.



Rommel in N.Africa.



POWs at Tobruk-Gazala



The Cauldron, and for two wild days behind the enemy at Mteifel.

## ***Part Four***

### **BATTLE OF STALINGRAD AND THE GERMAN COUNTER STROKE 1943**

#### ***Study Panel***

Brig Ihsan Ul Haq  
Lt Col Gulraiz Afzal Khan

(2008 – 2009)





## *CHAPTER - I*

### **GEO-STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT & OPPOSING STRATEGIES**

As part of his advancements, Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia in March and Poland in September 1939. Denmark and Norway were invaded in April, Netherlands and Belgium surrendered in May while France fell in June 1940. Luftwaffe launched "Battle of Britain" in July. In the same year, Hitler moved troops to Rumania to protect its oilfields from a Russian threat and sent Rommel and his Afrika Corps to help Italians in North Africa in February 1941. Germany, Italy and Bulgaria invaded Yugoslavia while Greece surrendered to Germany in April the same year.

Stalin and Hitler signed Nazi - Soviet Pact in August 1939 while Red Army invaded Poland in September and Finland in November. Stalin occupied the Baltic states and issued 24 hours ultimatum to Rumania extorting from her the cession of Bessarabia and drew closer to Rumanian oilfields in 1940. France signed armistice with Germany and was divided in two zones in June 1940. British captured Tobruk and attacked Italian controlled Ethiopia in March 1941. Italian Army surrendered to Allied forces in April 1941. Italy invaded Albania in April 1939 and British Somali and in August 1940. Japan signed 'Tripartite Pact' with Germany and Italy in September the same year. Bulgaria joined the Axis in March 1941.

Hitler launched Operation Barbarossa against Russia in June 1941. German Forces reached closer to Leningrad in the North, Moscow in the centre and Kharkov in the South by December. In early months of year 1942, German Forces were deployed from Finland to the Crimea in a series of huge defensive camps. Despite staggering losses Russians maintained constant pressure on German Forces in November / December 1941 and launched a series of hastily planned counter attacks. Russia started preparing for a general counter offensive and started accumulating its vast resources in 1942. Russia and United Kingdom signed an agreement in July 1941. USA joined war on 8 December 1941. Finland and Hungary declared war on Russia in June 1941.

The Battle of Stalingrad was the decisive World War – II victory of the Russians, which stopped the German's onslaught and turned the tide of the war. At Stalingrad, Soviet armies began the series of offensives that were to take them to Berlin. The first phase of Operation Barbarossa carried the Germans to the outskirts of Moscow and Leningrad in 1941. However, in summer of 1942, Hitler changed his strategic objective to the oil fields of the Caucasus as their capture would deprive the Russians of their fuel supply. Simultaneously, the German 6th Army was ordered to capture Stalingrad. Hitler was determined to capture it as it was a major manufacturing centre and the key to the communications system of southern Russia, but Stalin was equally determined to defend it, as it bore his name. His order was read out to every Soviet soldier - 'Not a step backwards'.

By July 1942, the oil fields seemed to be at Hitler's mercy. However, change in plan, taking part of the forces away from Stalingrad wrecked the Caucasus campaign. From 23 August onwards, when German Sixth Army

reached Volga at Stalingrad, Soviet and German infantry fought a long battle for months. In the mean time Soviet armies, regrouped. On 19 November 1942, forces under General Zhukov attacked on both German flanks. Within 5 days they executed a pincer movement that encircled roughly 300,000 German and satellite troops. Hitler forbade General Paulus from attempt to break out, which might have saved German troops in early time frame. After failure of a relief operation in December, the Russians called on Von Paulus to surrender. Hitler ordered him to refuse, made him a Field Marshal and informed him that no German Field Marshal had ever been taken alive. To Hitler's disappointment he preferred to surrender alive on 2 February 1943. By then 70,000 Germans had died in Stalingrad. The Russians took 91,000 prisoners, including twenty-four German Generals.

Despite this, the Germans sent a powerful message within weeks of their defeat through a brilliantly planned and masterly executed counterstroke by Manstien at Kharkov. It reminded the world that German's weakest hour was still far away. Nevertheless, the history would reveal, Stalingrad was a turning point in the war on the Eastern Front. It placed Stalin at a position of strength and within 18 months, Russia had recovered all the territory. In 1943, the question was no longer 'if' Germany could be defeated but 'when'.

### **Opposing Objectives and Strategies**

Expansion into European Russia had long been Adolph Hitler's obsession. It was to the east, that, Germany would seek its Lebensraum. The ultimate objective was to establish defences against Asiatic Russia from a line running along River Volga to Archangel. During

the pre-war session (Spanish Civil War 1937-1939 and Czechoslovakia), while Germany was rearming and developing its Blitzkrieg Strategy, Britain and France followed the policy of appeasement to avoid war but in reality bought time for the preparation. Germans too had several reasons for invading Russia. First the secret clauses of Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact with Russia had initially benefited both sides but later provided more dilemmas than solutions. This pact secured Germans rear and ensured against a war on two fronts was regarded as Hitler's great strategic victory. In their book 'Oil and War', Goralski and Freiburg claim that one of the secret clauses of the Pact promised all of the oil from Galician oilfields to be given to Germany as a compensation for award of the majority of Poland to Russia. Another clause pertained to Bessarabia in Romania. On 14 June 1940, however, Russia advanced into Bessarabia, Bukovina and Romania. Later, the occupation of Bulovina followed by trade agreement with that state considerably hurt Germany's armament production. On 22 June 1941, the German Armed Forces crossed the Polish border to unleash the largest campaign in the history of mankind.

Hitler dreamt of Germany as a mighty European power. His strategy had been to consolidate Germany's domination over Central Europe and then to raise Germany to the status of world power in two stages: the building up of continental empire embracing all Europe, including European Russia, and the attainment for Germany of equal rank with the British Empire, Japan and the United States, through the acquisition of colonies in Africa as a storehouse of supplies and construction of strong fleet with the bases on the Atlantic. German objectives were manifold. Restoration of lost German might and power which were curtailed by the Treaty of Versailles, was at the top of German designs and objectives. Abrogation of

Treaty of Versailles on the pretext that Germany alone was disarmed and that no other power had fulfilled its obligations under the treaty to do the same, was included in German designs. The quest for *lebensraum*, i.e. eastward expansion of Germany by absorbing European portion of Russia, was also German objective (**Map-29**). German racism, in the garb of *Untermensch*, was also to be promoted. Hitler eyed at the control of economic resources. For a self-sufficient Germany particularly oil, food and raw material were essential. Then the defeat of Communism was also German objective.

The Germans adopted the strategy of annihilation based on the overall concept of *Lebensraum*. Focus was on exterior maneuver for isolation of the enemy. Preparatory manoeuvre was undertaken to create favourable environment through indirect strategy. Bulk of Russian Army in Western Russia was to be annihilated in bold operations by deeply penetrating panzer wedges and withdrawal of combat capable units to be prevented. By rapid pursuit a line had to be reached from which the Russian air force could no longer attack German territory. Final objective was to have a screen against Russia in Asia from general line Volga – Archangel within three months through a bold, decisive and lightening campaign.

**German Strategy for the Eastern Front (1942).** On 22 June 1941, Hitler unleashed 'Operation Barbarossa'. German Forces crossed Poland and East Prussia rupturing the strong Russian defences (**Map-30**). Army Groups North and Center advanced to north of the vast Pripet Marshes toward Leningrad and Moscow, while Army Group South struck south of the Pripet toward Kiev and the Ukraine. Armoured spearheads were backed up by massive Luftwaffe effort, which was directed at the enemy air assets, artillery, communication nodes and re-

supply system. Germany achieved a strategic surprise on the Eastern Front. Less than two months into the campaign, the German Army stood on the doorstep of the greatest military victory in history. Inconceivably, Soviets had elected to fight on the frontiers, inviting encirclement and destruction. Once the Germans broke through the main defences (front-line), the pace and depth of their attack prevented the Soviets from forming coherent defensive fronts, leaving isolated pockets to be cut off and destroyed. Everywhere, the panzers stood victorious, having come farther and faster than any armed force ever had. The original allocation of forces, which gave Army Group Center two panzer groups (the others had only one), mirrored German Army's view that Moscow is the enemy center of gravity. Yet throughout the Campaign Hitler wavered, in some cases restraining the advancing panzers and in others tasking them for a subsidiary task.

On 21 August, captivated by the huge Soviet forces in the Kiev Salient, Hitler ordered to break off the armoured advance on Moscow and encircle Kiev. Guderian was to wheel southeast to close the northern pincer around the city and link up with Von Runstedt's panzers coming up from the south. Hoth was diverted northward to assist Von Leeb. The advance towards the capital slowed to the pace of the weary infantry as the panzers moved off on their new task. At this critical juncture, Hitler committed his greatest blunder by sending the panzers of Army Group Center away from Moscow to complete the capture of the Kiev pocket. He willfully threw away his best and perhaps only chance to achieve a decision in the east and victory in World War II. The decision gave the Soviets two months to regain their balance. When Germans resumed their advance on Moscow in early October, they were confronted with an ever-growing Soviet resistance

Though within 35 miles of Moscow, Germans could not achieve what they could have a month back. The armies stood in a stalemate and in view of extremely harsh weather conditions Hitler had to order the withdrawal of his forces to resume the offensive next year.

In the early months of 1942, the mighty German war machine's main objective was to drive the Soviet forces out of the Southern Steppes and the Caucasus region. Reasons for this were that Axis forces could have direct access to the Middle East and be able to have the military capability for a final annihilating sweep Northward behind Soviet lines to Moscow. Hitler considered the 1942 Summer offensive vital to the victory in the Second World War. In terms of German Grand Strategy, failure to knock Russia out of War in 1942 would leave it embroiled in a hopeless multi front war against stronger adversaries. A renewed full scale offensive entailed substantial risk as the last years' winter battles had left the German Army drained of strength and it could not rebuild its combat potential to pre- Barbarossa levels. Besides it three widely apart objectives were also difficult to achieve.

Hitler decided to try something new after unfortunate stalemate at the central front and seek decision in the south by depriving Stalin of his Caucasus oil and thrusting into Persia. At that time Rommel was preparing his offensive against British positions at Ghazala and Tobruk, the heart of British defenses in North Africa and was to advance right across Egypt and the Arabian Desert to the Persian Gulf. In this way, Persia the only point of contact between Britain and Russia and after Murmansk the greatest supply base of United States help for Russia would be eliminated. The renewed offensive was characterised by indirect approach aimed at the industrial and economic potentials of Russia. The objective Southern Russia comprised of



rich Caucasus oilfields, the industrial Donets Basin, and the wheat fields of Kuban. Hitler abandoned his earlier plan to pursue offensive on both flanks on advice of his economic advisors; however, he kept an option open to move northwards to Moscow after the objectives in the South had been achieved. He also aimed at securing passes over the Caucasus, to sever the Lend Lease Aid being channeled through Central Asia and eventual control of the oil in the Caspian Sea.

Russia adopted an attrition-oriented military strategy through full exploitation of its geographical power. It planned to conduct exterior manoeuvre to forge alliances in order to secure political and material support and to seek the opening of second front. Trade space was to be created in a controlled retreat to gain time for mobilization of the resources (including allied support) and to energize national will. It would exhaust the enemy by holding nodal spaces, "scorched earth policy" and partisan warfare. Russia eyed at exporting communism through opportunism. It wanted to gain time by articulating the mutual destruction and neutralization of the capitalist countries.

## *CHAPTER - II*

# **OPERATIONAL DIRECTIVES, BATTLE OF STALINGRAD AND MANSTEIN'S COUNTER STROKE**

### **Operation Blue - Directive 41**

The 1942 Summer Offensive was code named Operation Blue (originally Siegfried) and issued as Fuhrer's Operational Directive 41 on 5 April 1942. Cognizant of the previous year's difficulties and loss of over 1.5 million men, Hitler's objective was confined to Southern Russia, i.e. destruction of Russia's remaining strength by securing the control of Caucasus oilfields, Industrial Donetsk Basin and wheat fields of Kuban. Achievement of rapid and decisive success to avoid a two front war was the overriding purpose of the campaign. Army Group South led by Von Bock, was reorganized into two separate manoeuvre elements, i.e. Army Group A and B to be commanded by List and Von Bock. It was assumed that winter battle in Russia was nearing its end. Russia had suffered severe losses in men and material and, during the winter had expended the bulk of his reserve intended for later operations.

The key points of the Directive hinted at a number of situations. Preliminary operations involving mopping up and consolidation of the entire Eastern Front/ rear areas would precede the offensive. The Army operations were

to create conditions with minimum expenditure of the forces to be backed up by the Luftwaffe. The offensive would be opened by Army Group B in the northern sector, whereas, main effort comprising Army Group A would unfold in a later timeframe to secure Caucasus **(Map-31)**. Destruction of the enemy forces implied the pushing of the front between River Don and Volga. Seizure of the Caucasus oilfields and capture of passes opening towards Trans Caucasian countries, i.e. Iran and Turkey were predicted. Based on false image that Russia had suffered colossal losses in men and material and had already expended the reserves intended for the later operations, Leningrad's final encirclement was planned. But it was subject to favourable force ratio pending completion of the offensive in the south. Massive a.r. operations were to be synchronized with ground operations. Naval operations were involved for the naval blockade of Gulf of Finland and protection of sea lines of communications in Black Sea.

Manoeuvre plan was laid out in four phases. While Army Group North and Centre were to be on defensive, a reinforced Army Group South would undertake three parallel thrusts. Phase 1: Army Group B (northern wing) would execute two pincer manoeuvres to capture Voronezh and to establish a strong defensive front between Orel and Voronezh. It was a protective manoeuvre in essence to provide flank protection to the offensive by advancing eastwards to River Volga. Romanian, Italian and Hungarian Armies were to be inserted into the lengthening left flank as the advance progressed. Phase 2: The pincers after uniting at Voronezh would drive south to Minerva to link up with Army Group B (southerly wing) originating from Kharkov to encircle and destroy enemy forces west of Don. Phase 3: Army Group B (northern

and southern wings combined) will then wheel south to link up with forces advancing from Taganrog - Artelnovsk near Stalingrad. The pincer advancing towards Stalingrad will secure the north eastern flank. No mention as regards capture of Stalingrad was made. The right flank was to be strengthened by improvised motorised and armour units. Phase 4: With the northern sector secured, Army Group A would advance into Caucasus through Rostov and wheel southwards while other sub efforts would enter through Kerch Peninsula thereby capturing the oilfields and the mountain passes. Under the combined pincer pressure of Army Group B and A, the Russian resistance broke down and the German Mechanized forces gained clear run through the Don-Donetz corridor, with their flanks covered by the two rivers. Within less than a month they reached the far end of corridor and crossed Lower Don North of Rostov. This opened the road to the Caucasus oil fields.

*Operational Directive 41* suffered from muddled strategic thinking aptly described in his book "*Russo German War 1941*" by Albert Seaton, "Operational directive which Hitler himself drafted was an untidy disarray of disconnected thoughts containing ideas and irrelevances, a hotchpotch of strategy and tactics, it made no mention of the enemy strength, dispositions and intentions and was very confusing in its aims" Our this study would reach certain conclusions. Even if successful, the offensive would leave most of the Soviet Armed Forces intact. During the 1941 winter counter offensives, the bulk of enemy forces opposite Leningrad, Moscow and Kharkov remained concentrated along the front. Though large forces could be probably drawn to the south, those were unlikely to be encircled and destroyed. The Plan whose overriding strategic purpose was timely and concise completion of operations to avoid two front war, made no provision for

dealing with the greater portion of Soviet military might and the strategic reserves. The purpose to be served by seizure of Caucasus oilfields was narrow. German analysis emphasized on benefit of its capture rather than its denial to the enemy. Similarly, though the seizure of the passes had bearing on flow of Lend Lease Aid, it was not vital to destruction of the enemy. Timelines for achievement of the military aim were not set. Then, Hitler failed to recognize the center of the gravity of the enemy and as such lost his interest in Moscow. Resultantly, Leningrad was relegated to an objective of secondary value and its capture was subject to the availability of force for its final encirclement. Stalingrad's capture was not part of the mission, neither operation for capture of communication centre of its size would help in rapid conclusion of war. Dedication of ill-equipped and recreated units for the flanks was fraught with danger of rupture by the enemy as the advance progressed. Objectives were ambitious given the combat potential of different formations and its strain on logistic stamina of Germany.

Hitler did not visualise the possibility of kessel and ker technique being employed against his forces neither did he warn the Luftwaffe for undertaking large-scale sustenance operations. An inherent weakness in this plan was that with the progress of the offensive to the South-East, Don flank became longer and more exposed.

### **Operational Directive 45**

On 23 July 1942, three weeks after commencement of the renewed offensive, Operational Directive 45 was issued. Apparently, Fuhrer seemed content with the progress of the offensive; however, in reality he had become increasingly impatient with delays those were essentially due to his own fault. That is why he made an arbitrary decision to split the operation into two totally separate parts from a coherent two-stage operation.

There were few changes from original plan, Directive 41. Army Group B was to encircle and destroy enemy forces south of River Don and Rostov. Even the bridgehead sites were indicated. Two armoured formations of Army Group A placed under its command were changed for this purpose (**Map-32**). Then, this Army Group had to occupy Stalingrad in earlier timeframe and establish blockade against shipping in River Volga and land communication between Rivers Volga and Don. Blockade of main course of River Volga for shipping around Astrakhan was planned. Army Group A was planned to occupy entire eastern coast of the Black Sea after destruction of the enemy forces south of Don. Romanian Mountain Corps was visualized to take up defence after the completion of the advance. Following were also planned for this Army Group:-

- Occupation of Maykop and Armavir in Kuban with remaining elements.
- Capture of Grozny for flank protection.
- Capture of Baku.
- Detach five divisions of 11 Corps for Leningrad after conquest of Crimea. Additionally, two divisions were earmarked for France.
- Luftwaffe was ordered to avoid damage to refineries and storage tanks in Caucasian oilfields unless necessary for the army operations.

*Operational Directive 45* was mirror reflection of Hitler's frustration and obsession to conclude the campaign in early timeframe despite he was reasonably aware of enemy reinforcements. Inclusion of task regarding capture of Stalingrad was tangent to the overall strategic purpose of rapid conclusion of war on Eastern Front. Operations of 6th Army were designed to cover the flank of Caucasus front and important politico - economic

targets. For this task capture of Stalingrad might be useful but not indispensable. Hitler could not visualize the strategic withdrawal of Soviets across Don as they refused battle and thought it as end of their strength. He instead of pursuing the Russians cut short 4th Panzer Army advance towards Stalingrad halting it in front of Don loop and turned it to Rostov. Hitler thus not only changed the timetable of summer offensive but entire structure of Southern Front.

Hitler was so confident that he did not use 11th Army standing ready in Crimea to strike across Kerch Strait. Instead he entrained it for North to take Leningrad. Hitler also transferred SS Panzer Division from eastern front to France for rest and regrouping. These forces could have avoided Stalingrad catastrophe. No strategic reserves were available at this point of time, yet Hitler aimlessly dissipated his forces by allocating objectives after objectives to Army Group A. By dividing the Army Group South into two, the supplies were divided. As greater distances were to be travelled south, priority was given to this group thus halting the advance of Army Group B. The blockade of Volga near Astrakhan would add to the burden of Army Group B as it was nearly 400 kilometres from Stalingrad. Hitler failed to appreciate significance of air strikes (on oil refineries and storage tanks) on outcome of war. Undue interference in domain of army group headquarters and even corps by suggesting the minor details didn't fit into the ambit of strategy and later proved a recipe for disaster.

### **Battle Of Stalingrad**

Strategic importance of southern front as a whole figures out due to agriculturally rich Donetz Basin, oil rich Caucasus and strategic linkages between ports of

Black and Caspian Sea as well as its mountain passes connecting Turkey and Gulf countries with Russia. The area of operation was bounded by Kiev Voronezh in the north, River Volga in the east, Caucasus Mountains located between Black Sea and Caspian Sea in the south and Kiev-Sevastopol in the west. The area of operation could be compartmented into northern and southern sectors. Northern sector was comparatively open and had important population centers. It was crisscrossed by a number of rivers, which canalized operations into corridors. Strategically, combination of rivers and towns were focal points which formed effective barriers favouring the defenders, however, the overall wide spaces within these corridors offered equal opportunities for employment of large scale mechanized forces. These rivers flew NW to SE, therefore for any east-west or vice versa movement, planned crossing of these barriers was a must. Thus crossing sites on these rivers got pronounced importance. The only crossing at Rostov for Caucasians had its own strategic value. The southern compartment had more terrain friction due to 700 miles long Caucasus Range. Most of the US aid was also being dispatched through Black or Caspian Sea. When talking of opening another sector, landing of Allied Forces was also feared from Black or Caspian Sea.

By mid September 1942, General Von Paulus and his 6th Army were in the heart of the ruined city of Stalingrad. Only the troops of 62nd Army fighting with their backs to the river Volga were denying Gen Von Paulus the victory Hitler desired. Stalingrad was a city that lent itself for defence being approached over open steppes across ravines and riverbeds. Buildings beaten by bombardments provided ideal cover for what the German soldiers called battle creaks. The armour was deployed with difficulty



and the German's had to use special sapper companies, flamethrowers and direct artillery in their struggle against the defenders. Russians operated in small flexible groups fought hand to hand with the German holding on to a narrow strip of the city on the west bank of the river Volga. With each day passing, Hitler became more and more determined to take Stalingrad which had become a symbol of communism that had to be crushed at all costs. Complete 6th Army strength was poured into the city in the bloody street fighting. On the face of it, it looked very simple for an Army, which had so many victories to its credit to capture a city of 30 by 15 miles. Especially when the operation of German Southern Army Group in Don-Donetz corridor had been so spectacular and the objective was just 35 miles away Hitler took it for granted that Red Army was on the verge of collapse, therefore 6th Army was ordered to capture Stalingrad on 23 July 1942.

Stalingrad (Volgograd since 1961) is located in South East European Russia. Being a major port on River Volga and the eastern terminus of Volga-Don Canal, the city was considered to be having prime importance. Stalingrad was an elongated city having four subdivisions, i.e. tractor plant, Barricade plant, Red October plant and Central Station which was protected from south by Tsaritsa River. The city emerged as an industrial base at the beginning of 2nd World War producing armaments for Russia. As a trans-shipment point, the Port used to handle oil, coal, ore, lumber, and fish. It also was a major rail centre and gateway to Urals, Moscow, Donets Basin, Caucasus, and SW Siberia (Centre for heavy industry). Militarily, capture of the city was not vital to accomplishment of the mission of Operation Blue. Disruption of the industrial output, severance of the rail and water ways would have sufficed as it was located on axis of the auxiliary effort.

### Operational Developments at the time of Battle

German Army Group B had two distinct tasks, firstly, protection of northern flank of the Main Effort directed against Caucasus Oilfields, and then capture of Stalingrad. Initially, Stalingrad was assigned to 6th Army (General Friedrich Paulus) and 4th Panzer Army (General Hermann Hoth). However, Hitler's decision to detach 4th Army to speed up operations of Army Group A eliminated chances for capture of Stalingrad. It was quite possible, because, Russians at that stage were not well organized for its defence. Worst came fortnight later when 4th Panzers Army was ordered to revert back for capture of Stalingrad. Hoth had to halt his formation 160 kilometres from city as major part of the fuel supplies had been diverted to the south for Army Group A. This kept 14th Panzer Corps inactive for nearly 18 days.

Opposing Forces			
Category	German		Soviet
<b>Armies</b>	Army Group 'A': 1st Panzer, 11th and 17th	Army Group 'B': 4th Panzer, 6th, 2nd Hungarian, 3rd and 4th Rumanian, 8th Italian	51st, 62nd, 64th and 1st Tank.
<b>Manpower Ratio</b>	2.3		1
<b>Tanks Ratio</b>	2		1
<b>Guns</b>	1		1
<b>Planes</b>	3.6		1

The German plan was initially based on Directive Number 41 up to 23rd July and thereafter on Directive

Number 45. Under the overall strategic plan the operations of the 6th Army were designed to cover the flank of the Caucasus Front and its important military economic objective. The 6th Army therefore, was tasked to launch the protective manoeuvre and advance against Stalingrad, thus destroying Soviet concentration, and then occupy the city and block the strip of land between Don and Volga. Don was to be prepared as a defensive line. Operations were to be launched from Kharkov to the Don and then develop in a South-Easterly direction towards Stalingrad.

Russians planned to hold the City through drop-feeding with fresh troops and supplies while keeping the rearward link open until the River Volga froze in the winter. They, while fighting a defensive battle, were to conduct retrograde operations on four successive fallback lines to trade space for time, i.e. Don, Riverine between Don and Stalingrad, out-skirts of Stalingrad and Urban line. Main defensive battle was to be conducted on inner and urban lines. Having lured in the enemy at Stalingrad, counter offensive was planned from the flanks of Axis armies to encircle and annihilate the German.

On 21 August 1942, 51 Corps ex 6th Army established bridgehead across River Don and on 22 August, 16th Division of 14 Panzer Corps broke out. The break out was supported by massive air support from 4th Fleet of Luftwaffe. Richthofen, the Fleet Commander asked the land forces commanders, "make use of the air today. You will be supported by 1200 aircrafts. Tomorrow I can't promise you any more". On 23 August, spearhead of the 6th Army reached River Volga, north of Stalingrad and captured 8 kilometre wide strip along the River bank. Armour and artillery started to interdict the ships and ferries in the River. While opposition from Russian 62 and 64 Armies

stiffened, Paulus gained control of the gap between Don and Volga Rivers and established air and supply bases. On 2 September, German forces established link up with Hoth's 4th Army. The fighting in the built up area was dominated by infantry. Panzer and motorised units were seriously handicapped by their inexperience for urban warfare. Sniping became hallmark of the urban war. A few days later, Germans fought their way into the industrial sector in the north, but on 29 September 1942 Chuikov threw them out. On 14 October regrouped, reinforced and supported by tanks and dive-bombers, Germans hammered at the Russian defences for 10 days. Russians were able to ferry fresh troops and much-needed supplies. By 24 October, 6th Army had fought itself to a standstill in the north of Stalingrad without evicting its stubborn enemy. Not much was now left of the City which had once housed nearly half million people. On 19 November just as the city seemed, about to fall, reinforced Soviet armies launched operation Uranus and encircled 6th Army.

Number of aspects influenced the negative outcome of the battle. Mid-course change in strategic orientation had its implication. Germans lost the strategic advantage due to two divergent strategic objectives in the advance, beyond the Don. Previously, they had been moving strategically concentrated having flexible grouping along an axis, whereas their opponents were kept on the horns of dilemma, while they themselves could swing their weight wherever a weakness developed in the Russian Front. Russians were so widespread in Don-Donetz corridor that Stalingrad and Volga could have been gained with ease had 4th Panzer Army, advancing on Stalingrad not been diverted towards lower Don. By the time, 4th Panzer Army turned northward against Russian Forces on the Stalingrad Sector, Russians had

reorganized, regrouped and readjusted their defences. Due to diversion of oil supplies towards Army group A, 4th Panzer Army remained practically out of battle at critical time. Wrong employment of Panzer Armies also influenced the negative outcome. Panzer troops were involved in fighting in built-up-area dominated by infantry operations especially sniping. Panzer troops were unable to deliver for the task, they were not trained/ experienced. German offensive operational cycle reached its point of culmination before capturing Stalingrad, logically they should have considered a tactical defensive posture on Don bend, which they did not, whereas Red Army kept trading space for time, improved their relative strength ratio, taking advantage of interior lines at Stalingrad and passed from defensive to offensive cycle at opportune time. Germans were running on very narrow margin of material strength as compared to at the time of conception of this campaign. Russians due to Allies support and national spirit were gradually gaining relative strength superiority.

### **Russian Counter Offensive**

At this time Hitler was preoccupied by the turn of the tide in Africa where Rommel was on the retreat from El Alamein and warnings about Anglo-American fleets heading for North Africa. The landings of Operation Torch focused his attention on Africa. At this stage Richthofen the commander of 4th Air Fleet did divert his air effort on enemy concentrations but it was too late. Reaction to the threat was not just a question of too little, but Hitler's illusions played their part. He covered himself by ordering reinforcement of the northern Romanian flank with depleted and weak 48th Panzer Corps. The threat to the southern flank was not taken seriously as no reinforcements were made and 14th Panzer Division remained standby. Germans were running on very narrow

margin of material strength as compared to at the time of conception of this campaign. Russians due to Allies support and national spirit were gradually gaining relative strength superiority. Germans were strategically over stretched with vulnerable flanks being guarded by Axis armies of Rumania, Hungry and Italy. For Russians their lines of communication by air, railway, roads and River Volga navigable channel provided facility in transportation of troops and war material. Germans had no strategic reserves where as Russian strategic reserves were shifted to Stalingrad front from central sector. Despite successful manoeuvre by Germans in Don- Donetz corridor, Red Army was holding three bridgeheads on Don in the vicinity of Kalach, Serafimovich and Kletskaya. The Soviet Supreme Command assumed that a defeat inflicted on the Germans at Stalingrad would also endanger enemy forces in Northern Caucasus, causing recoil. Russians filled with the spirit of nationalism were fighting for their land and survival. Russian Army formulated plans code named MARS and URANUS to counter German Summer Offensive.

*Operation URANUS* was the main offensive aimed at encirclement and destruction of German forces in the south whereas *Operation Mars* was to be launched in a later timeframe to tie down German Army Group Centre to deny Germans shifting of forces towards the south. The key was to hold Stalingrad as a fortress to cause maximum attrition on the enemy with bare minimum troops to keep the front alive by drip feed method. No troops were to be wasted on counter attacks at smaller scale unless necessary to prevent the capture of the eastern bank of River Volga. While the Germans concentrated all their forces on Stalingrad, Russians secretly assembled fresh armies for a major encirclement using deep thrusts

behind the point of the apex. The rigorous preparations were unheard of and contrary to Hitler's belief who not only doubted the veracity of the reports regarding Russian preparations but also considered them incapable of mounting a large scale offensive.

The planning for Operation URANUS saw an increased role for maskirovka after Army changed to strategic offensive. The hallmark of the secrecy was the concealment of the counter offensive preparations and clever regrouping of the forces. German intelligence had failed to ascertain the raising of five tank armies (each roughly the size of panzer corps) and fifteen tank corps (each equal to a strong panzer division). Seventeen dummy brigades were created to mislead Luftwaffe. On the other fronts activities were stepped up. The plan for the Operation URANUS was simple but daring Blitzkrieg type ambitious plan. Zhukov's objective was not just to win the Battle of Stalingrad but rather the entire South Russian Campaign. The main assault was to be the double envelopment of the 6th Army aimed at cutting its axis of advance some 100 miles west of Stalingrad. The point of attack precluded the possibility of any reaction by mechanized columns of the 6th Army.

There were a total of 11 Russian Armies including those deployed for defence. Out of these, seven armies (including those carrying out auxiliary tasks) were employed for the counter offensive in a double pincer. The outline of the plan included number of forces. South West Front was commanded by Nikolai Vatutin having 1st Guard Army, 5th Tank Army, 21st Army and 65th Army, and Stalingrad Front was led by Yeremenko comprised 51st, 57th, 62nd and 64th Armies. Rokossovsky headed Don Front having 24th, 65th and 66th Armies. Overall it had a million men with 900 tanks. On the other hand main German forces

of Army Group B operated in middle Don, Don, Stalingrad and farther South along Sarpa Lakes. The Army Group included 6th and 2nd German Army, 4th German Panzer Army, 2nd Hungarian Army, 3rd and 4th Rumanian Army, and 8th Italian Army. There was parity in numerical strength except for marginal Soviet superiority in tanks. However, as the initiative was with the Soviets therefore they were able to achieve a substantial superiority (over 3:1) at the point of application.

The Operation URANUS was aimed at encirclement and destruction of the 6th Army. South West Front was to attack 3rd Romanian Army and 11 Corps ex 6th Army south-eastwards from north Serafimovich bridgehead on 40 miles stretch to drive onto Kalach, south of Stalingrad. As auxiliary effort, Stalingrad Front was to attack 4th Romanian Army south of Stalingrad and link up with Vatutin's forces at Kalach whereas, 62nd Army was to frontally hold enemy at Stalingrad. As per plan, 65th Army of Don Front was required to affect an inner strike south of River Don at Kletskaya and attack 11 Army Corps on reverse front. The remaining Front was envisaged to undertake a holding action to keep 6th Army pinned down in the north closer to Stalingrad.

### **Conduct – Operation Uranus**

On 19 November 1942 when weather suggested otherwise, Russians unleashed their offensive with attacks from South West and Don Fronts. Attack on the southern flank commenced on the same day (**Map-33**). The attacks were preceded by tremendous artillery barrage and air bombardment (**Map-34**). Army Group B ordered 48th Panzer Corps already in the area to reinforce Romanians but Hitler changed the orders by tasking 6th Army to send troops from 11th Corps (under



its command). The changes in the orders only made the things worse. Instead of deploying the Panzer Corps en bloc, 1st Romanian Panzer Division was made available thereby leading to further disasters. The orders for counter attack being hopelessly late could not be implemented. Ironically Paulus didn't do anything to prepare 6th Army for the impending enemy operations and left his divisions bogged down in Stalingrad. Seventeen hours after the attack, the fighting in Stalingrad froze and troops were dispatched to strengthen the rear flank of 6th Army.

Russian 62nd Army defending Stalingrad launched strong attacks on the disengaging Germans and extrication in face of enemy pressure didn't prove rapid. Paulus at this moment was looking for orders from commander Army Group B and he in turn was dependent on Fuhrer's instructions. Hitler's determination to control the events produced a devastating immobility when greatest rapidity was needed. While northern pincer was progressing well the attack in the south made a relatively slow progress initially due to lack of transport for infantry and stiff resistance of Germans who had reinforced the southern flank. On 22 November, Paulus moved his Headquarters closer to Stalingrad. On 23 November Vatutin captured the vital bridge on River Don at Kalach and established the link up with Stalingrad Front. 6th Army and part of 4th Army (20 divisions), 2 Rumanian corps, mass of Army Artillery, Engineers units and nearly 330,000 men were firmly trapped. In the process, 3rd Romanian Army was destroyed while 4th Romanian Army was badly battered. The encircled troops included 5 German Corps. On 26 November, Hitler ordered 6th Army to "stand fast". Goering's unrealistic assurance boasted to meet Paulus' demand of 750 tons of supplies per day furthered

reinforced Hitler's perception to disallow the breakout from encirclement. On 27 November, Von Manstein was appointed commander of the newly formed Don Front and was tasked to undertake relief operation in support of 6th Army.

The Red Army's strategic posture remained defensive during the course of the Operation. They evaded pincer moves by trading space for time up to Don except at Kalach. Although Red Army suffered tactical annihilation at Kharkov but bulk of the Red Army withdrew intact towards Stalingrad and Caucasus whereas German 6th Army did not make any effort to avoid encirclement, during Russian counter offensive. Russians initiated number of measures to ensure numerical superiority at point of application. Contrary to German expectations, at Stalingrad seven Russian Armies were employed against 6th Army with separate reserve for each sub sector.

German front remained obviously over extended. 6th Army and part of 4th Panzer Army were operating against Stalingrad with flanks held by weak satellite armies. Army Group A in the meantime had advanced deep into Caucasus and the total frontage held by both Army Groups was over 2090 kilometres. (Voronezh – Stalingrad – Mozdok) with an Inter-Group gap as large as 190 kilometres in the Kalmyk was guarded only by an inadequately equipped 16 Motorised Division. Hitler compelled Army Group B to tie down its principal striking force, 6th Army and 4th Panzer Army, in the fighting around Stalingrad. These two armies were so weakened in the gruelling fight for Stalingrad that they were unable to capture the city completely. Germans, therefore, failed to achieve their strategic objectives for 1942.

### **Manstein's Counter Stroke**

Manstein's counter stroke inflicted a heavy blow on Russian Army that went some way to offset the debacle at Stalingrad. A brilliant counter offensive and exciting operation of war was launched which fully exploited the superior German mobility and over-extension of confident Russians. Not only did it avert the gravest danger of annihilation to German troops in the South, but also severely mauled 25 mechanised brigades of Russian Army. Manstein achieved this success by skilful employment of limited forces through combination of fast concentration, deployment of reserves, bold manoeuvres and flexibility.

The year 1943 commenced with the humiliating defeat of Germany at Stalingrad and the decisive turning point in the East. Beside this when 6th Army was at the verge of surrender at Stalingrad, a greater disaster was already looming over 900,000 troops of the Army Group South. This coupled with defeat of Rommel in Africa and commencement of the strategic bombing of Germany put her on the horns of dilemma during the period of January – March 1943. Hitler who had earlier been insisting on holding every inch of the captured territory, despite his Generals' advise had failed to grasp the concept of withdrawal in order to create favourable conditions and then develop counter offensive at the ground of own choosing. It was due to prevailing environment that he agreed to Manstein's strategic withdrawal plan and his counter stroke because the Germans desperately needed a victory.

Disposition of the German Army is highlighted here. 6th Army was beleaguered in Stalingrad and after failed relief operation, the fall of the Stalingrad was only days away. Middle Don Positions (east of Voronezh) held by

Hungarian and Italian Armies had collapsed following Russian offensive (Little Saturn) resulting into a wide gap on the front line. Army Group A (1st Panzer Army and 17th Army) was in process of withdrawal from Caucasus and Kuban. 4th Panzer Army was striving to cover the northern flank of 1st Panzer Army by keeping the lines of communication and control of river crossings. The overextended lines of communication particularly the strategic rail link with its bases in the west were extremely vulnerable to exploitation by Red Army. Italian, Hungarian and Romanian armies (German allied troops) were severely mauled by the Russian offensive and were in no position to hold any area independently. More so Germans had lost confidence in these troops. Kharakov was captured by Russians and SS Panzers managed to escape the encirclement in the city.

With the victory at Stalingrad, Russian Army had expanded the scope of strategic offensive including ambitious strategic objectives in the South and centre. South Western Front after overcoming 8th Italian Army had now captured Kharkov and Belgorod. Southern Front was attempting to threaten retreat of Army Group A. Russian armies fighting in the South were severely attrited and under strength after protracted operations. Seven armies used for the encirclement of Stalingrad were now available for expanded offensive. Weather conditions were turning fast in favour of defender due to severe cold and resultant ground friction. Russians had crossed Donetz River and were wheeling south in an effort to reach Sea of Azov and trap first Panzer Army. With the advance towards objectives as deep as line River Dneiper, the Russian forces had over-extended and over stretched.

It was Russian strategy to cut off Axis forces flanks; occupy Dneiper crossings to seal off Army group's fate

by taking advantage of their numerical superiority and shorter distance. As per Russian Plan, their Operation was to be conducted in three phase. In first phase, 4 Army Groups, Bryansk Front, Veronezh Front, SW Front and South Front were to advance on broad front capturing area upto general line Mius-Aydar River. Phase-II planned that Bryansk and Voronzeh Army Groups were to thrust towards Poltava-Kiev to envelop Army Detachment Kempf and block crossing at Kiev. SW Army Group was to block German routes of withdrawal on Dnieper River between Dnepropetrovsk and Zaporozhe, and South Front was to contain the German to deny them hitting the base of operation. Annihilation of German Southern Army was to be attained as final blow.

German plan was based on being tactically defensive and strategically on offensive with two phases: *Phase-I*. Withdrawal from East and South and take defence along Mius-Donetz Rivers by Hollidt and Kempf Arm.es. 48 Panzer Corps was placed under Hollidt to act as mobile reserves. This was to be followed by creation of a gap to lure in the Russians to carry out, offensive baited gambit; and *Phase-II*. Development of counter stroke by 6 Panzer Corps on Russian Southern flank in the area of Izyum - Kharkov. Objective was not to capture Kharkov but to annihilate Russian forces. Germans wanted to make strategic withdrawal, lure in the Russians in the mistaken belief of a general German retreat, even disintegration. Their strategy was to stretch Russians to bring early culmination point of offensive. With the power of a recoiled spring, then destroy maximum enemy and capture depth echelons.

### **Conduct**

1st German Panzer Army was withdrawn from Caucasus and Rostov was abandoned. It was now assigned the task

to form the continuous defences with Army Detachment Hollidt along river Donets. 2 Panzer corps were moved to general area Stalino to form part of Counter Stroke Force. 4th Panzer Army comprising 2 Panzer corps was moved from Rostov to area East of Zaporozhyya to act as counter stroke force in conjunction with 2 Panzer corps ex 1 Panzer Army. Army Detachment Hollidt was withdrawn from the defensive line Donetz to defensive line Mius. On 16 February 1943, Army Detachment Kempf withdrew from Kharkov to avoid envelopment from north/ Belyorod and relocated north of Poltava. Newly inducted SS Panzer Corps equipped with Tiger Tanks were positioned in Krasnograd area for Counter Stroke. All this redeployment was carried out to occupy compact defences along Mius - Donetz rivers and position counter stroke forces having flank protection (**Map-35**).

Hollidt and 1st Panzer Army withstood attacks and provided secure right flank for assembly of counter stroke force. Up North, Army Detachment Kempf remained firm at north of Poltava, confining the penetration of Russian forces in the pre-designated area, and provided protection to the left flank of the counter stroke force. 1st Panzer and 4th Panzer Armies were concentrated between Stalino - Zaporozhyya to launch a counter stroke on the Russian troops which had gained the penetration. This concentration was completed on 10 February 1943. To trap the jubilant Russians, Germans intentionally permitted them to exploit the gap near Izyum. Without realizing the Manstein's intention, Russians continued their advance towards Lozovaya - Pavlograd and by 21 February 1943 forward elements of Russian's 6th Army and 1st Guard Army managed to reach in the vicinity of Dnieper. This was the 'Defensive Baited Gambit' Manstein had conceived. The further they advanced, the more

punishing would be counter offensive. By withdrawing he was attriting, stretching and achieving culmination.

Manstein unleashed counter stroke force on 21 February with about 350 tanks. Four Panzer corps, i.e. 48 & 57 Corps ex 4th Panzer Army and 3 & 40 Corps ex 1st Panzer Army from the south launched counter stroke from South and one SS Panzer corps from the north, in a coordinated move, enjoying massive air support struck at the advancing Russians left flank. For annihilation of the trapped Russian Army, main manoeuvres were launched in following two phases:-

- On 21 February, 4th and 1st Panzer Armies launched main counter stroke from the north and SS Panzer Corps struck from the South/Krasnograd direction, hitting Red Army which was trying to create a wedge toward Dnieper. Converging efforts on near concentric objectives cut the enemy advancing elements. The second and third Pincers established contact in the north with Army Detachment Kempf. The euphoric Russians were taken completely by surprise. The terrain was almost flat and crisscrossing frozen fields, enabled German armour to move at their maximum speed. The advancing Russians failed to exercise their control and as a result German counter stroke rapidly pocketed encircled units. Some Russian formations eluded the trap but were savaged.
- The Russian high command still believed the German counter offensive had been staged to cover withdrawal of Army Group South. However, the process of annihilation was accelerated when on 23 February, Waffen SS Panzer Corps and Panzer Detachment assembled West of Kharkov,

put pressure on the Russian line around Kharkov. On 7 March, 4th panzer Army shifted its attack towards Kharkov. A twenty mile gap was opened between 64th Russian Army and 3rd Tank Army. Kharkov was captured on 14th March and Belgorod on 18th March. Russian forces withdrew upto 100 miles on this front thus forming Southern face of Kursk salient. Sensing danger of being cut off; Soviet Forces in the Southern front also fell back behind Donetsk.

**Manstein's Operational Vision.** Field-Marshal Von Manstein was a military genius, a successful staff officer and ablest field commander who played a key part from 1941 to 1944 in the titanic struggle on the Russian front. He conceived the plan for the German offensive of 1940 which broke through the Western Front, and led to the fall of France. He commanded a Corps on Leningrad front, an army in Crimea and an army group in eastern Russia with brilliance. An enterprising personality who had a knack for all military assignments, he combined modern ideas of mobility with classical sense of manoeuvre and executed a strategic withdrawal and a counter stroke under the worst operational and strategic environment. Although this operation had been relatively small and short, it was a classic example of victory snatched from defeat. In little more than three weeks Manstein demonstrated the German army's superior strategic vision and remarkable power of recovery.

As part of his defensive strategy, Manstein gave priority to operational mobility instead of holding territorial gains and adopted elastic defence in depth. Withdrawal was to be covered through system of 'stop gaps' to cover own retreat and lured the enemy into trap. He secured liberty of action and flexibility for conduct of defensive operations



from Hitler and conducted defensive operations without interference of, the draconian stand fast policy. 1st Panzer Army's withdrawal was to be combined of as a protective manoeuvre in the north to deter outflanking by Russians while ensuring strategic rail network. Manstein ensured cohesive fight with depleted formations, ad hoc command structures, teething problems of fresh formations and enormous mobility differential between armour and infantry. As per his vision, he conducted successful defensive operations by taking calculated bold risks in using the mobile forces and employed armour with a difference and launched masterly counter stroke. His style of command distinguished him from his peers wherein he would provide firm operational guidance and greater degree of initiative to subordinates in using their formations and terrain to the maximum advantage. Hard pressed infantry units often under resourced and lacking adequate training were employed in the static defence, devoid of any tactical depth. Panzers and motorized units were used for the counter attack, spoiling attacks and retrograde battle to cover the withdrawal of infantry. A firm believer of the concentration at the point of decision he resisted any temptation to distribute armour for the protection of the infantry or employment as counter attack forces.

Manstein's counterstroke remained focused on destruction of Russian offensive forces as a most important component and relegated space oriented objectives like Kharkov and Izyum to lower priority. He conducted a strategic withdrawal by trading space for time besides luring enemy into a trap who was enjoying superior relative strength ratio. Very dexterously, he exploited Russian irresistible temptation of pursuit of strategic withdrawal, enforcing their perception as general retreat,



Map 30: Operation Barbarossa

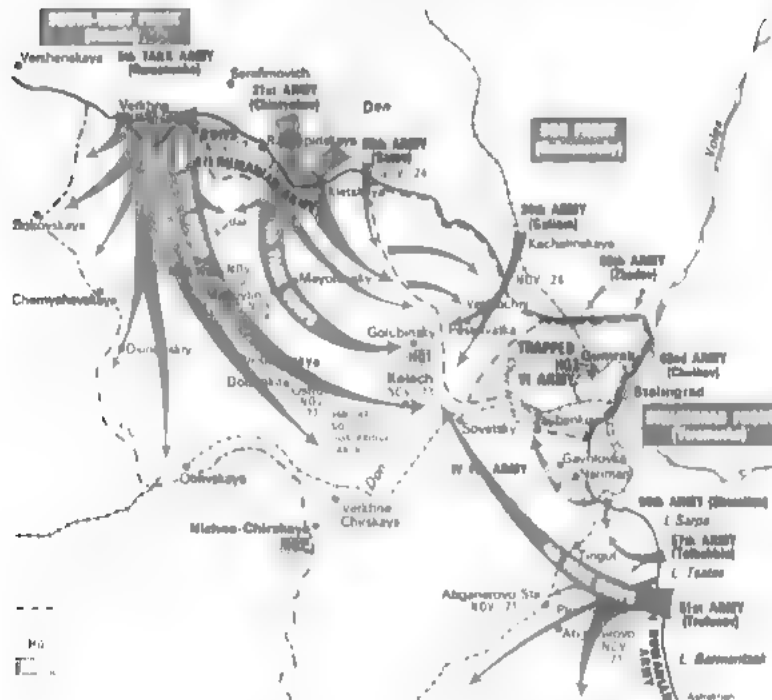


Map 31: Operation Blue

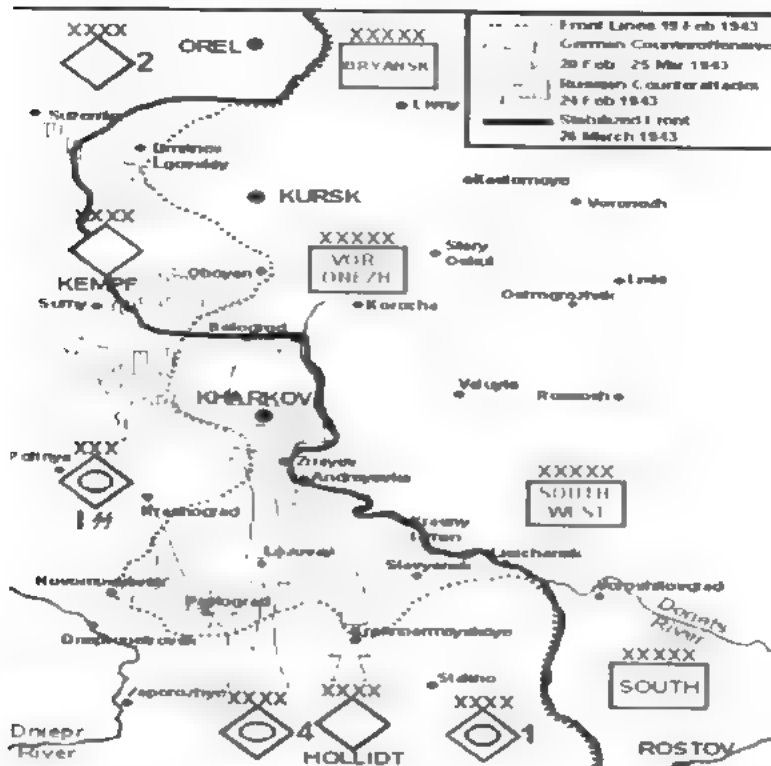


Map 32: Directive 45



**Map 33: Russian Counter Offensive****Map 34: Operation Uranus**

### Map 35: Manstein's Counter Stroke



### *CHAPTER - III*

## **ANALYSIS OF THE CAMPAIGN**

Various battles and manoeuvres made it clear that throughout the campaign, German military aim was well-focussed; however, the campaign objectives and time frame were too ambitious. Germans adopted strategy of annihilation within an overall offensive strategy which worked well, during early stages of the campaign due to superior doctrines and equipment. However, she started to suffer after being overstretched, effecting midcourse change in the strategic direction and over centralisation. On the other hand, Russians adopted a defensive offensive strategy in year 1942. Their retreat was a calculated withdrawal which gave them time to reorganize their new armies by trading space. The vastness of Russia allowed it to arrange controlled retreat to its advantage and launch a counter offensive which resulted in encirclement of 6th Army. They also exhausted the Germans by occupying nodal points, scorched earth policy and partisan warfare. Russia had a well founded aim to trade space for time in order to mobilize the industrial and human resources to support a protracted war with Germany. At the end of war, Russia was able to win large territories and satellite states and came out as a major beneficiary.

Hitler perceived Red Army as the centre of gravity and wanted to destroy it in western Russia in a lightening campaign. He stuck to his perception even when the campaign was losing its meaning. German generals, on

the other hand were of the view that Moscow was the centre of gravity as it was the seat of Stalin's power. In 1942, Hitler focused his military power against the Caucasus Oilfields and Dontez Basin. His orientation was further distorted by concentration of all his forces against Stalingrad. Had he visualized Moscow as centre of gravity in 1941 and would have pursued it rather than diverting his forces to Kiev he could have succeeded in achievement of military aim. The centre of gravity of the German forces was their Panzer groups and air fleets. The Russians identified this at a later stage and lured German Panzer formations into vastness of their terrain and confronting them with population centres like Stalingrad.

Imbalance was inherent in German strategy due to lack of strategic reserves and divergent efforts. In Army Group B imbalance was created due to temporary shifting of 4th Panzer Army at critical stage of the battle. Imbalance also existed on the flanks of Stalingrad held by the weak Axis Armies which was fully exploited by the Russian. While Russians successfully maintained balance by trading space for time. Their balance rested in reserves, which were ultimately concentrated at Stalingrad. Russians were lured into defensive baited gambit while executing their counter offensive and were imbalanced by Manstien counter stroke. Their prolonged advance from Don to Dnieper exposed their flanks and strained their logistic support which gradually led to an imbalance in the Russian offensive operations.

Germans offensive operations reached an early culminating point due to pursuit of distant and multiple objectives, disregard for the time and space dimensions, reduction in combat power, lack of logistics and inaccurate intelligence while culminating point of the Russian offensive forces in the South arrived due to overextension



of offensive maneuver, exposed flanks, high attrition and poor intelligence about enemy. Initially, Stalingrad was assigned to 6th Army and 4th Panzer Army. However, Hitler decided to detach 4th Army to speed up operations of Army Group A. This eliminated chance for capture of Stalingrad, as Russians at that stage were not well organized for defence. This was the point in time when Germans had superior relative strength and mobility. Russian counter attack trapped 6th Army in Stalingrad. A quick breakout could have saved part of the Army and helped restore the front. However, this opportunity was also lost due to lack of timely decision. German panzer formations made best use of the open stretches and conducted swift and crippling manoeuvres up-to and beyond the Don River. Thereafter, they got diluted in spaces by overextending the operations towards South. In and around Stalingrad, the space shrunk for the German Panzers and street fighting started consuming the infantry. The closer they converged on Volga, lesser became the scope for manoeuvre. The relative strength factor worked slightly in favour of Germans in the South until end of July 1942 due to Russian expectation of German summer offensive in the central sector. Hitler underrated the Russians but overrated the Western Allies. In the autumn of 1942, he feared an allied invasion. It was tying down 29 German divisions including 6-7 German Panzer divisions – a quarter of them might have turned the fate at Stalingrad.

Russians launched a timely counter offensive to trap 6th Army, however, they failed to trap and seal off Army Group A in time especially during its withdrawal from the Caucasus front. Russians strategic withdrawal over to Don was interpreted as Soviet collapse by the Germans. In this way they shrewdly first regulated Army Group B towards Stalingrad and later pitched them against built up area.

Russians created strategic reserves against the German 6th Army. In Stalingrad alone, the Russians had mustered 7 Armies which apparently the Germans failed to identify. Besides this, the US and British military assistance helped them in achieving relative strength. The vital space of Donetsk Basin could have been exposed by denying critical space of Rostov bottleneck to German 1st and 4th Panzer Armies. However, selection of ambitious objectives as far as Sea of Azov diluted the Russian forces.

By trading space and exploiting inherent mobility of their formations, German military commanders managed to win the race for time. 1st Panzer Army withdrew 400 miles from Caucasus in 20 days and crossed Rostov bottleneck to Middle Donetsk, while Russians traversed 20 miles in the same time. Skilful manipulation of space enabled Manstein to concentrate relatively superior forces at the point of decision. By shortening the front by 600 miles and by occupying natural defence lines along various rivers, Germans successfully adjusted force to space ratios. The critical spaces were not only denied to the enemy but also managed to increase the resistance capacity. Russians diluted their superior concentration in pursuit of ambitious objectives upto Dnieper crossing and lost the advantage thereby falling prey to pre planned counter stroke.

### **Strategic Posture**

Germans adopted a strategic and tactical offensive posture during Summer offensive in the southern sector. After failure of 6th Army's operations against Stalingrad, Germans could have considered its withdrawal to Don or Donetsk River by adopting a defensive posture. Alternatively, an operational pause could have been ordered to avoid the enemy counter offensive. Germans were, however; quick

to regain their balance after their failure of the relieve operation. Springing from a defensive baited gambit they traded space in Caucasus to conserve their forces and launched a counter stroke against overstretched Russians thus successfully completed the defensive operational cycle. Selection of the German strategic objectives was driven by economic considerations. Operationa Directive 41 laid Caucasus as the strategic objective; however, in the mid course Stalingrad was also included to be captured simultaneously. As such the diversion of the forces from one objective to the other was a grave mistake. Hitler's decision to change the objectives from military to economic was not based on the accurate assessment of the economic capacity of Germany. As it proved later, Germany was able to sustain its war machine even for three years after the subject battle. Capture of Stalingrad was pronounced as strategic objective without visualising its implications. First of all, prioritization of Stalingrad over Caucasus was wrong. This shift in objectives, transfer of troops amongst Army Groups and over extended supply system had made both commands "too little and too late". Then, no strategic reserves were earmarked for two divergent objectives. Two objectives 650 miles apart in fact required two separate and divergent operations.

Russians adopted a strategically defensive and tactically offensive posture in this summer campaign and successfully completed the operational cycle by encircling 6th Army. Russian strategic objectives were a combination of force and space oriented missions. Extension of ambitious objective of the destruction of the Army Groups implying advance as far as Kharkov and Sea of Azov was unrealistic. Germans adopted an indirect approach particularly their counter offensive by Manstien in tackling the Russian pursuit. In tackling Stalingrad

Germans resorted to the use of direct approach thereby resulting into disastrous casualties. Indirect approach formed basis of all Russian strategic decisions. During Summer offensive, when head of the German Forces was involved at Stalingrad, Russians attacked the vulnerable flanks of Army Group B with ultimate object of dislocation.

Germans lost the strategic advantage due to two divergent strategic directions beyond the Don. Simultaneous pursuit of Caucasus and Stalingrad was not reflected in the distribution of the forces and this change in strategic direction ultimately resulted in Germany's defeat. Hitler envisaged securing of Caucasus and Stalingrad simultaneously. Both objectives could not be attained due to vast frontage of 2080 kilometres (Voronezh-Stalingrad-Mozdok) and depth of 678 kilometres (Kursk-Stalingrad) the conception of operation demanded a far greater quantum of forces. As a result German forces were diluted in the vastness of Russia. Russians adopted a converging strategic direction in their operation against 6th Army and exploited weak flanks and lack of German operational reserves.

The gradual loss of air strips, intermittent clear weather and inability of Luftwaffe to provide requisite supplies were key elements leading to the defeat of the 6th German Army. Logistics also suffered serious blow from Russia's scorched earth policy and partisan movement. Russia's logistics were tremendously boosted after its industrial bases were shifted East of Urals and when aid started flowing from UK and US. Operational level logistics support experienced a crunch after the Battle of Stalingrad when their lines of communications were overstretched. Russians were also handicapped due to transport problem, when advancing beyond their railheads. Luftwaffe was weakened by months of

intensive combat by October 1942. In addition, as the Germans captured more and more territory, its capacity to provide sustained support was also seriously curtailed due to loss of a.i. bases. Russian Air Force enjoyed more liberty of action as more and newer equipment arrived. Hitler did not trust his generals and relied too much on his own instinct, whereas 6th Army commander Paulus possessed an exaggerated respect for chain of command which hindered him to take an independent decision for breakout plan of 6th Army. Russians were better off on this account; in fact, Zhukov hand handpicked the commanders for the counter offensive.

The Battle of Stalingrad was a major turning point in World War - II, and one of the bloodiest battles in human history. The battle is taken to include the German siege of the southern Russian city of Stalingrad (today Volgograd ), the battle inside the city, and the Soviet counter-offensive which eventually trapped and destroyed the German and other Axis forces in and around the city. Total casualties are estimated between 1 and 2 millions. The Axis powers lost about a quarter of their total manpower on the Eastern Front, and never recovered from the defeat. For the Soviets losses were over one million soldiers and civilians during the battle, the victory at Stalingrad marked the start of the liberation of the Soviet Union, leading to eventual victory over Nazi Germany in 1945.

For the heroism of the Soviet defenders of Stalingrad, the city was awarded the title 'Hero City' in 1945. After the War, in the 1960s, a colossal monument of "Mother Russia" was erected on Mamayev Kurgan, the hill overseeing today's Volgograd. The statue forms part of a memorial complex which includes ruined walls deliberately left the way they were after the battle. The Grain Elevator, as well as Pavlov's House, the apartment building whose

defenders eventually held out for two months until they were relieved, can still be visited. One may today even find bones and rusty metal splinters on Mamayev Kurgan, symbol of both the human suffering during the battle and the successful yet costly resistance against the German invasion.



A Russian gun booms on the streets of Stalingrad.



Battle of Stalingrad (23 August 1942 - 2 February, 1943).



Bodies of German soldiers at the Leningrad front.



A long column of Axis Romanian POWs captured by the Soviets at the Battle of Stalingrad.





German infantry cross a sea of ruins in the Barricades factory in Stalingrad.



German soldier with captured Russian submachine gun.



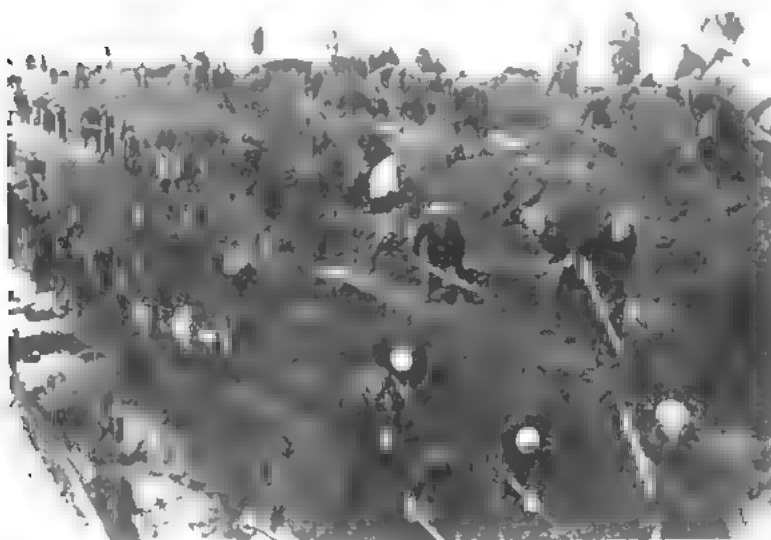
Red Army soldier marches a German soldier into captivity after the victory.



Soviet Children hiding from Nazi bombardment during the early stages of the Battle for Stalingrad.



Soviet soldiers advance on German positions during the first days



With all the men at the Front, Moscow women dig anti-tank trenches around Moscow in 1941.

## ***Part Five***

### **ARDENNES COUNTER OFFENSIVE (DECEMBER 1944 – JANUARY 1945)**

#### ***Study Panel***

Lt Col Abdullah Dogar  
Lt Col Tariq Masood Janjua

(2008 – 2009)



## CHAPTER - I

### **PREVALENT GEO – STRATEGIC AND MILITARY SITUATION**

During late 1944, as World War – II was drawing towards its close, German Wehrmacht was on sharp decline. Third Reich's ambition for *Lebensraum* by conquering neighbouring countries one by one had been effectively mauled and Germany was suffering reverses on all the fronts. The Allies were infected with the over-confidence that sprung from sweeping victories they had carried with themselves to the border of Third Reich. The joint and synchronized offensive of Britain, United States and Russia was the most convincing evidence to show that Hitler had achieved what he had striven to avoid: the same alliance of nations which had defeated Germany in First World War was now poised to defeat Germany in World War – II. The Italian peninsula had been captured, and the Allied armies were advancing rapidly through France and Low Countries, while Russian Army was steadily closing in on the Eastern Front. Hitler knew the end was near if something could not be done to check the Allied advance. Living up to his reputation, he soon came up with an offensive plan to do this. Ardennes Counter Offensive, also known as "Battle of the Bulge" was the last German offensive in the West during World War – II. Following the Normandy invasion in June 1944, Allied forces swept rapidly through France, but soon reached their culmination point along the German Border in September 1944, as the long Allied supply lines extending back to

the English Channel could not be stretched any further. On the Eastern Front the seasonal surge of battle was beginning to ebb, the Soviet summer offensive seemed to have run its course, and despite continuing battle on the flanks, the centre had relapsed into an uneasy calm.

On the Allied side, the threatened American sector appeared quiet. Thus, on 16 December, taking advantage of weather that kept Allies aircrafts on the ground, the Germans launched a counteroffensive through the hilly and wooded Ardennes country and advanced 80 kilometres into Belgium and Luxembourg. Their aim was to divide the Americans and the British and retake the vital Seaport of Antwerp. Though the Americans were taken completely by surprise, they put up a resolute resistance and were able to hold critical communication centres (Saint Vith and Bastogne) thus denying Germans a drive towards their final strategic objective. The German effort was doomed after 23 December, when good flying weather allowed the overwhelming Allied air superiority to make itself felt. Nevertheless, it was not until the end of January 1945 that the last of the 80-kilometer deep "bulge" in the Allies' lines was eliminated.

Tracing back, at the end of November 1943 in Tehran Conference of the Trio; Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin agreed to launch Russian Offensive on the Eastern Front and *Operation Overlord* in Western Europe to liberate France and march on to Germany during the summer of 1944. Till mid 1944, the Germans still occupied most of the Western Europe captured in 1940. They lost in Northern Africa but were still holding on in Italy. On the Eastern Front, the Russians had launched their Summer offensive. In late 1944, at the time of Ardennes Counter Offensive, Germany appeared isolated. Italy had capitulated and Japan had politely suggested that Germany should start

peace negotiations with the Soviets. In Southern Europe, towards the end of August, the Rumanians and Bulgarians had hastened to switch sides and join the victorious Russians. Finland had broken away from Germany on 2 September. Hungary and the Croats continued to battle alongside Germany. Political and military reverses so severe as those sustained by the Third Reich in the summer of 1944 necessarily implied severe economic losses to a state and a war machine fed and grown strong on the proceeds of conquest. Rumanian oil, Finnish and Norwegian nickel, copper, and molybdenum, Swedish high-grade iron ore, Russian manganese, French bauxite, Yugoslavian copper, and Spanish mercury were either lost by the Germans or denied by the neutrals who saw the tide of war turning against a once powerful customer.

On *the Eastern Front*, by the end of July 1944, the Russians had re-conquered roughly all the territory owned by them in 1939. The Soviet summer offensive had carried to the borders of East Prussia, across the Vistula at a number of points, and up to the northern Carpathians. Only a small slice of Rumania was left to German troops. In northern Finland and on the Murmansk Front, nine German divisions held what earlier had been the left wing of the 700-mile Finno-German Front. Now the Finns no longer were allies, but neither were they ready to turn their arms against Generaloberst Dr. Lothar Rendulic and his nine German divisions. The Soviets likewise showed no great interest in conducting a full-scale campaign in the sub-arctic. With Finland out of the war, however, the German troops had no worthwhile mission, except to stand guard over the Petsamo nickel mines. Only a month after Mannerheim took Finland out of the war, Hitler ordered the evacuation of Finland and of northern Norway. Hungary and the Croats had German garrisons in their respective



capitals. But the twenty nominal Hungarian divisions and an equivalent number of Croatian brigades were in effect neutralised by the two Rumanian armies, which had joined the Russians. By mid-September the German forces in southern Greece and the Greek islands (except Crete) were withdrawing as the German grasp on the Balkans weakened. On the Italian Front, Generalfeldmarschall Albert Kesselring's two armies retained position astride the Apennines and, from the Gothic Line, defended northern Italy. Here, of all the active fronts, the German forces faced the enemy on something like equal terms—except in the air. Nonetheless the Allies were dangerously close to the southern entrances to the Po Valley. In the East the Soviet Summer Offensive had driven in one sweep from the Dnieper to the gates of Warsaw and the banks of the Vistula and had isolated temporarily an Army Group in the Baltic States. In the Balkans, the Russian had occupied Rumania, then Bulgaria and Hungary, thus forcing Hitler to withdraw forces from Greece and Albania. In Italy the Germans had fallen back to the Gothic Line, last trans-peninsular defence position short of the Po Valley. In the far North, capitulation of Finland had rendered untenable the advanced German positions in the Scandinavian theatre of operations.

The defection of Rumanian, Bulgarian, and Finnish forces was far less important than the terrific losses suffered by the German armies themselves in the summer of 1944. On the Eastern and Western Fronts the combined German losses during June, July, and August had totalled at least 1,200,000 dead, wounded, and missing. The rapid Allied advances in the west had cooped up an additional 230,000 troops in positions from which they would emerge only to surrender. Losses in material were in keeping with those in fighting manpower.

Though by May 1944, Hitler was facing reverses on other fronts, on *Western Front* he was still in control of France, Luxemburg, Belgium and Holland. The Allies had already decided during the Tehran Conference (in November 1943) to open up a new Front against Germany for the liberation of Europe. Plans were carved out during the Trident Conference for the invasion of Europe through France. Normandy in Northern France was selected as the point of application. The operation was code named Overlord. General Eisenhower was appointed Commander of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF), to execute this operation. Initially, this invasion force consisted of five infantry divisions; two American, two British, and one Canadian - assigned to establish foothold at five places on the beaches of Normandy and two American and one British Airborne Divisions were to land behind the German defences in area North of Carentan and East of Caen. The invasion was to be supported by more than 13,000 fighters, bombers, and transport aircrafts.

On June 6, 1944, the U.S 1st Army, under General Bradley, and the British Second Army, under General Dempsey, established beachheads in Normandy, on the French Channel Coast (**Map-36**). The invasion began with an armada of 3,000 landing craft, 3,000 other ships and naval vessels. 822 aircraft, carrying parachutists or towing gliders were used to drop three airborne divisions behind enemy lines. The German resistance was strong, and the footholds for Allied Armies were not nearly as good as they had expected. Nevertheless, the powerful counterattacks by which Germans had contemplated to throw the Allies off the beaches did not materialize, neither on D-Day nor later. By June 7, the beachhead consisted of three separate sectors. At a minimal loss of

ife, the Allies succeeded in bringing ashore a massive force of sixteen divisions in just five days. By June 12, the American Corps were able to expand the beachhead upto 15 miles in the depth. By the end of June, Allies had 850,000 men and 150,000 vehicles ashore in Normandy. However, fierce German resistance foiled Allied attempts for quick capture of Caen and Contentin Peninsula. As of July 24, the Allies were still confined in the Normandy beachhead, which they had expanded somewhat to take in Saint-Lô and Caen. Nevertheless, slow paced battle of the beachheads proved to be a blessing in disguise as it drew bulk of German forces, albeit only in penny packets.

In breakout (codenamed as *Operation Cobra* – referred to in **(Map-37)**, Eisenhower regrouped his forces. Montgomery took over the British Second Army and the Canadian First Army (on the left). Bradley assumed command of a newly activated Twelfth Army Group consisting of US First Army in the centre and Third Army on the right under General Hodges and General Patton, respectively. The breakout strategy agreed upon by the Allies was that the British Army on the left would continue its attacks to attract the greatest possible portion of the German Armour, while the American Forces would begin attacking southward with a view to breakout on the right flank. On July 25, US 12th Army Group under General Bradley broke out with an attack south from Saint-Lô. Thereafter, the front expanded rapidly due to the effects of American overwhelming superiority in airpower and tanks. They were able to open the gap through which the US 1st Army sped toward Avranches and captured it on July 31. At this point General Patton's newly formed 3rd Army joined in the advance which turned towards the south and encircled the Germans in Normandy from the rear.

Allied air superiority made it difficult for Rommel, who was in command on the scene, to move his limited reserves. Moreover, Hitler became convinced that the Normandy landings were a feint and the main assault would come north of the Seine River. Consequently, he refused to release the Reserve Panzer divisions and insisted on drawing in reinforcements from more distant areas. However, after identifying sweep of American forces southward from Avranches, the Germans quickly moved westward all available armour from the Caen Area to Counter Attack against the narrow strip through which American Forces were pouring deep into their rear. This attack, if successful, would cut in behind breaking out troops and place them in serious trouble. Thus, Germans launched Operation "**Lüttich**", using 4 SS Panzer Divisions on 7 August. The Americans got prior intelligence and in time turned east from Avranches and north from Laval, the German offensive was stopped and defeated in its tracks. On August 16, Hitler at last recognized the inevitable and gave permission for a withdrawal from Normandy. The Germans held out until August 20 but then retreated across the Seine. The only route of escape lay through a gap between the converging American and British spearheads at Falaise. About 240,000 remnants of the German 7th Army and 5th Panzer Army succeeded in breaking through and reached the Seine River. They left behind in Normandy some 50,000 dead and 200,000 were taken prisoners.

After successfully beating back the German counter attack, Allied advance made some good progress due to relative vacuum thus created. Bradley and Montgomery sent their army groups north and east across the Seine, the British going along the coast toward Belgium, the Americans toward the Franco-German border. On 25

August the Americans, in conjunction with General Charles de Gaulle's Free French and Resistance Forces, liberated Paris. Towards North, Montgomery's tanks encountered hardly any resistance on the way and made great progress. Meanwhile, on 15 August, American and French Forces had landed on the southern coast of France east of Marseille and were pushing north along the valley of the Rhône River. The linkup took place with Bradley's forces near Dijon in the second week of September. In early September, British troops captured Tournai, Brussels and the Belgian port of Antwerp. It seemed as if nothing could now stop Montgomery's march to the Rhine. Later in September; Liege, Bastogne and the Ardennes were captured by American troops. Units of the 1st Army even crossed the border into Germany, heading for Aachen. But after intense battle, the German troops succeeded in halting the Allied offensive along the Siegfried Line. The Allied offensive thus culminated at the German border. By this time the Allies had already been overstretched and were facing acute problem of supplies. At this stage, Eisenhower was confronted with a choice of either continuing the attack on a narrow front to strike deep into heartland of Germany (Montgomery's Plan), or wait for the logistics build up and then resume the offensive on broad front. However, he was of the view that a pencil like thrust into the heart of Germany would meet nothing but destruction as Hitler still had considerable reserves left. Thus, he ordered for adoption of a broad front strategy which was relatively less risky. Hence, the Allies failed to achieve their main strategic goal of Summer 44 Offensive to decisively defeat the German armies west of the Rhine.

By September 1944, the British were pushing north east. Their goal was the Netherlands and the German industrial centre of the Ruhr. Meanwhile the Americans

were driving eastwards, towards the heart of Germany. *Operation Market Garden* was a plan to drop paratroopers behind the German lines and seize the key Dutch bridges. Thousands of Allied airborne troops landed in the Netherlands, west of the German border, at Nijmegen and Eindhoven, while British armoured forces raced toward a junction with the airborne forces. Although the British were able to reach and hold Nijmegen, the hardest battle was fought at Arnhem, which the Germans tried to hold at any cost. There the First British Airborne Division held the bridges and a bridgehead across the Lek, a northern branch of the Rhine and the last water barrier before entering the Reich. They were encircled and cut off. Strong and increasing German forces attempted to destroy the division before help could reach it. The weather was not favourable for sending supplies and reinforcements by air. The Division fought on against overwhelming odds for more than a week in view of the key importance of the strategic locality. Finally, on 27 September, the survivors of the British First Airborne Division were able to break out. Of the 8,000 men of the Division, only about 1,800 returned. The defeat at Arnhem changed the picture of the war. At this point the Allies paused and waited for their supplies to catch up, but this also gave the Germans time to strengthen their defences.

### **Situation on German Western Front – December 1944**

By mid-September the Allies had liberated most of France, Belgium, and Luxembourg and were holding a frontage of 400 miles along German western front. Montgomery had reached formidable water barriers - the Meuse and lower Rhine rivers and was threatening the all important Ruhr area, the industrial heart of Germany. The Americans were coming up against the West Wall

(Siegfried Line), which had been built in the 1930s as the German counterpart to the French Maginot Line. However, at this point of time the Allied offensive came to a standstill at the German border. Though staled by severe weather and resilient German defences, logistic limitations most impacted operational pause. Even with the capture of Antwerp, the enormous logistic requirements of the allies bottlenecked continued operations. The million gallons of gasoline and 2,000 tons of artillery ammunition used daily were road-hauled 350 miles from Cherbourg Harbour. Almost 95% of all supplies shipped to France remained sacked upon wharves and beaches far to the rear awaiting transport. There was a theatre-wide shortage of infantrymen. Planners had miscalculated the balance of infantry and technical or service troops, resulting in divisions with significantly reduced combat power. Exacerbating these personnel problems, the delayed shipment of cold-weather clothing resulted in almost epidemic levels of trench foot. Recognising the constraints, Eisenhower still believed in maintaining the initiative through the winters was vital to wear down Germany. Heavy losses in men (approximately 9000 casualties per day) and material inflicted upon Germany strengthened prevailing optimism of Allies that enemy could break at any time and does not possess capacity to mount major offensive. Consequently, a two pronged offensive into the heart of Germany was conceived aimed at stripping Germany of his Industrial Base of Ruhr District having Main Effort in the Ruhr Valley (Montgomery's Sector) while Secondary Effort in the south through Saar Valley (Bradely's Sector). The Allies posture was tactically defensive and strategically offensive (**Map-38**).

In north of Ardennes, the British 21 Army Group along with US First and Ninth Armies, were preparing for the

offensive towards Ruhr. First US Army was responsible for the defence of Centre Sector. By far the weakest area was the 80 miles sector along the Ardennes forest. One Mechanized Cavalry Regiment and 6 untried or battle-weary divisions were defending this sector having frontage five times wider than normal. South of Ardennes, US Third Army had broken through the Siegfried Line and was across the Sauer River, preparing for attack into the Saar. Farther to the south, the US Seventh Army had captured Strasbourg and reached the Rhine. The French 1st Army was on the extreme south flank. Strategic reserves comprising of two under strength US Airborne divisions were refitting in camps Suippes and Sissonne - north of Paris.

Allied Naval Forces were dominating the Sea Lanes of Communication in the English Channel as well as Atlantic, whereas the German Navy had ceased to exist as a viable force. The defeat of the submarines and the growing air superiority of the Allies represented outwardly a most dramatic change from the situation in 1941 - 42. Hence, resultantly, the American reinforcements were pouring in through Atlantic, and the British Army was being supplied through the Port of Antwerp. With over 5,000 aircraft, they had a clear edge and thus, weather permitting, were to enjoy complete air superiority. Allies were also confronted with major logistic challenges as they were maintaining their forces through distant port facilities in northern France and Belgium.

By the winter of 1944, the *Empire of the Third Reich* had been reduced to almost its pre-war boundaries. His allies had been defeated and the likelihood of annihilation was profound. Confronting two front dilemmas, it was considered opinion of German General Staff to conduct fighting withdrawal and consolidate east of Rhine River and



then allocate reserves against the Russians in the East. However, Hitler was still optimistic in saving Fatherland by mounting an offensive with newly created reserves in last three months. In the West, by mid September, the Allies had liberated most of France, Belgium, and Luxembourg and were threatening the all important Ruhr area, the industrial heart of Germany. Within three months, the Wehrmacht had lost in battle 50 divisions in the East and 28 in the West, a total of 78 divisions, or one and half million men, and an area several times as big as Germany. However, Germans made good use of the quiet period to rebuild and prepare for a large-scale offensive. Army Group B was earmarked for German counter offensive whereas Army Groups G, H and Oberrhein along with 15 Corps were tasked to defend German western borders. An assassination attempt on Hitler's life (20th July) had heightened his existing distress of the German General Staff, which he considered arrogant and conservative bureaucrats. He was surrounded by the most loyal and trusted officers, who would take orders and not question his judgement.

By end 1944, Germany had been defeated in the air. 2400 planes were initially earmarked by Luftwaffe to support the Ardennes Counter Offensive. However, during actual operations only 900 aircraft could be employed. The German lines of communication were quite extended, as most of the logistic installations were located east of Rhine. The problem was further accentuated due to Allies air superiority, as these were vulnerable to interdiction by air.

## *CHAPTER - II*

### **OPPOSING FORCES AND PLANS**

Ardennes, located in eastern Belgium and Luxembourg is a range of heavily forested hills and deep sided valleys running parallel from northeast to southwest. The area in which this offensive was launched is considered to be the most difficult terrain in the entire Western Front. In 1944, this region had only few good roads following the grain of the ground. This zone of operation, is actually a composite of two distinct features, i.e. Eifel and Ardennes. The Eifel is a complex of hill ranges lying between the Rivers Rhine, Moselle and Roer. The hills, sloping gradually in a north-western direction, are rarely above 1600 feet, whereas, Ardennes is a hilly and wooded area, extending from France through south-eastern Belgium, and from Luxembourg to the Rhineland, in Germany. It can be divided into three distinct compartments, i.e. High Ardennes in the south, Famenne depression in the middle and Low Ardennes in the north. The High Ardennes is a wide plateau extending NE to SW and forming a watershed between Rivers Meuse and Moselle. The Famenne depression in the middle reaches Meuse between Givet and Dinant and offers a good crossing site. The Low Ardennes in the north, however, tend to be more open and rolling and can be more easily traversed than the High Ardennes. Large sections of the Ardennes consist of gently undulating plateaus, with oak and beech trees; other areas are marshy and covered with heath. There were no cities in the Ardennes. The larger villages

had, in 1944, populations of 2,500 to 4,000. Bastogne in the south, and Malmédy and St. Vith in the north were important communication centres and dominated lines of communication in the Ardennes. Towards the west was the city of Liege on the Meuse and port of Antwerp laid a further 60 miles towards the north-west.

Ardennes being hilly and wooded was a restricted area hence friction was intrinsic and pronounced for any large scale operations. The area was served with numerous water channels having varying obstacle value. Meuse River, west of the Ardennes, was a formidable obstacle while in the east, Our and Sauer Rivers served as a border between the Germans and Allied troops. Other rivers flowing in north-south direction were Ambelve and Salm. In the centre of Ardennes ran the Ourthe River which originates west of Bastogne and meets the Meuse at Liege and has only partial obstacle value. All rivers in the area tended to cut across movement from east to west. The climate of the region was characterised by heavy rains and deep snows in winters with maximum rains in the months of November and December. The mists were frequent and heavy which lasted well into the late mornings. After the winter's first freeze, structure of soil in the area permitted cross-country tracked vehicles movement in much of the central sector. However, in case of rain it would turn completely boggy thus restricting the movement. For wheeled vehicles, the cross country movement was limited even in good weather due to wooded and hilly terrain. A number of all weather roads were crossing from German frontier to Belgium and Luxembourg but there was not a single highway traversing the Ardennes in east west direction. However, dirt roads made north-south movement possible. There was an extensive rail network on the German side which fed into the Eifel thus facilitating strategic assembly.

On the German side an extensive rail network, that fed into the Eifel, existed which could be used for strategic assembly and logistic support. Because of the layout of the valleys, East-West communication infrastructure in the region was relatively meagre. The character of terrain dictated three attack avenues from the German frontier: -

- In the north, through Low Ardennes towards Meuse River.
- In the centre between Malmedy and St. Vith.
- In the south between Bastogne and Luxemburg. It was the best route due to non-existence of worthwhile obstacles but was the longest for reaching the Meuse River.

German Commander Western Front was Field Marshal Von Rundstedt whose defensive forces included Army Group H, commanded by Student, were stationed North of Ardennes. The group comprised 15th Army and 1st Para Army. While Army Group G, deployed in Saar South of Ardennes consisted of 1st Army, and was commanded by Balck. Then Army Group Oberrhein comprising 19th Army, was headed by Himmler, in Southern Germany. As part of German offensive forces, Army Group B was positioned in the Centre at Ardennes under Field Marshal Model. This group was assigned the task of counter offensive after necessary regrouping. It consisted of 6th SS Panzer Army as main effort; placed in the north, it was under General Dietrich. It had 4 Panzer, 5 infantry divisions and a parachute brigade, composed of 1 SS Panzer Corps (2 SS Panzer divisions and 3 Infantry divisions), 2 SS Panzer Corps (2 SS Panzer divisions) and 67 Corps (4 Infantry divisions). Secondary effort (5th Panzer Army) was in the centre. Commanded by General Manteuffel, it comprised 3 Panzer and 4 infantry divisions. Part of this effort were 47 Panzer Corps (3 Panzer divisions and 2

Infantry divisions), 58 Panzer Corps (1 Panzer Division, 1 Infantry Division) and 66 Corps (3 Infantry divisions). 7th Army formed the auxiliary effort. Located in the south under General Brandenberger, it had 1 Para and 4 infantry divisions. Its formations were 80 Corps (3 divisions) and 85 Corps (2 Divisions). Reserve strength included two Panzer and three infantry divisions with OKW, while one Infantry division with Army Group B.

Allied Supreme Commander (SHAEF) was General Eisenhower who commanded 6th Army Group, 12th Army Group, 21st British Army Group and reserves. 6th Army Group was in the South at Alsace under General Dever, it comprised 7th US Army (commanded by General Patch) and 1st French Army under General Tassigny. General Bradley commanded the 12th Army Group, in the centre at Luxembourg, composed as following: -

- North – 9th US Army – General Simpson
- Centre – 1st US Army (5, 7 and 8 Corps) – General Hodges. Responsible for Ardennes with 5th and 8th Corps with total of 5 infantry and 1 armoured divisions.
- South – 3rd US Army – General Patton

21st British Army Group was operating in the North at Brussels, under Field Marshal Montgomery. 1st Canadian Army, commanded by General Crerar, and 2nd British Army under General Dempsey formed this Group. Reserves of this Army Group were 18 Airborne Corps (82 and 101 Airborne divisions), north of Paris at camps Suippes and Sissonne.

### **Evolution of Opposing Plans**

Overall comparison of the opposing forces is given below. During initial phase of the Ardennes Counter

Offensive, German forces enjoyed overwhelming superiority of 6 to 1 at the point of attack, however it turned in favour of Allies as 2 to 1 on 3rd January 1945 onwards.

Relative Strength		
Category	Germany	Allies
Forces (Divisions)	30	31
Troops	5,55,000	6,00,000
Tanks	2000	3200
Aircrafts	2400	5000

By the end of September 1944, Germany had lost much of the occupied territories but German soil by far had not been violated. The Germans were on defensive at all fronts with the Allies preparing for attack from all directions. At this stage there were three choices available; either to go in for one major offensive by making use of all the industrial and military resources of the Country, or to convert all original German territory into a fortress and defend it at all costs or lastly, the choice of an unconditional surrender. Hitler still considered the situation tenable and on 16 September 1944, decided in favour of launching a counter offensive. For this option, Hitler had two choices of theatres, i.e. in the East against Russians and in the West against Allies. Hitler decided to firstly destroy bulk of the Allied forces in the West and subsequently the German Forces could then be shifted to the East. Though many options were considered for destruction of Allied forces in the West, finally these were narrowed down to two different plans. Hitler's plan was based on larger objective. The plan evolved by

Hitler himself and the German General Staff envisaged Antwerp as final strategic objective, entrapping and destroying Allied Forces north of Ardennes in the process. In view of limited resources available, besides other field commanders, primarily Rundstedt and Model suggested the limited objectives of Liege and Aachen. The aim would be destruction of Allied offensive capability in the Aachen Salient. Hitler did not agree to this plan.

In the end, all adjustments to Hitler's detail vision of the offensive were dismissed. His perception of himself as an "authority in all spheres of life" combined with his distorted view of reality on the front drove him to adamantly maintain the plan as he first envisioned. In fact, to ensure compliance he attached a handwritten note to the final plan that read, "not to be altered". Driven by professionalism and realizing that this was the last hope for the Wehrmacht and the Fatherland, commanders adopted the plan as their own and feverishly worked to try and achieve the 'impossible'.

The major reasons for Hitler to take the initiative and launching an offensive in Ardennes were many. The Allies front in the Ardennes sector was very thinly manned. A blow here would strike the seam between the British and Americans and lead to political as well as military disharmony between the Allies. Furthermore a penetration along this seam would isolate the British 21 Army Group and allow the encirclement and destruction of the British and Canadians before the American leadership (particularly the political leadership) could react. Then the distance from the jump-off line to a solid strategic objective (Antwerp) was not too great and could be covered quickly, even in bad weather. The configuration of the Ardennes area was such that the ground for manoeuvre was limited and so would require the use

of relatively few divisions. The terrain to the east of the breakthrough sector selected was very heavily wooded and offered cover against Allied air observation and attack during the build-up for the assault. *"An attack to regain the initiative in this particular area would erase the enemy ground threat to the Ruhr". (OKW War Diary, 1 April-18 December 1944).*

While operating on interior lines, the German offensive would be launched with three armies to hit at the seam of Allied forces affecting penetration in lightly held Ardennes sector of US 1st Army, held by only five infantry and one armoured division. The heavy fir forest of the Ardennes would also permit concealed assembly of forces, enhancing element of surprise. After breakthrough at Ardennes, the forces would dash to Muse with panzers to seize crossings between Liege and Dinant, covering over 80 kilometres area in about two days - and finally wheel Northwest towards Brussels and Antwerp, causing strategic division between 12th and 21st Army Groups and then finally cut off British 21st Army Group from its main supply base of Antwerp. Intermediate objective would be establishment of bridgeheads over the Muse River between Liege and Namur with Antwerp as the final strategic objective. Scarlet thread would be the speedy development of operation to establish bridgeheads over Muse in an early time frame and to exploit the relative vacuum beyond while advancing towards Brussels and Antwerp.

The operation would be executed at various phases. The attack would be launched through the lightly held Ardennes sector with 29 divisions including ten Panzer divisions. The intermediate objectives would be the establishment of bridgeheads over the Meuse River between Liege and Namur. Thereafter, Antwerp would



be the final objective. A battle to annihilate the Allied forces would ultimately be fought north of the line Lege – Antwerp. Luftwaffe would support the attack of the ground forces with 2,400 fighters including 100 jets. However, the operation was to be conducted in poor weather conditions to nullify the superior Allied air force. To logistically support the operation, four million gallons of fuel and sufficient quantity of ammunition from the Hitler's reserve, more than the current needs of the theatre, will be available. Reliance was placed on the capture of Allied logistic dumps near River Meuse.

The Ardennes was considered a quiet sector by Allies, suitable for introducing raw formations to the front and resting units that had been battered in heavy fighting. This sector of almost 80 miles front was lightly held by 6 divisions as the Allies did not anticipate any offensive in this area though claimed, but never catered for any contingency plan or conceived any variant to defend Ardennes against a large scale offensive due to various reasons. In view of the Allies, Ardennes offered neither objectives for destruction of Allied forces nor a worthwhile strategic objective in the rear. The Allies had assembled two powerful army groups for the offensive, north and south of Ardennes. Montgomery's 21st Army Group in the north was poised for an offensive towards the Ruhr, while in the south Patton's 3rd Army was to project towards the Saar. Apparently there was no variant conceived for their employment from the flanks if situation so demands. Allocation of additional troops in the area would have been at the expense of offensive north and south of the Ardennes. Allied forces had superior mobility and sufficient transport for speedy re-deployment of forces.

As part of Allied defensive plan in Ardennes (**Map-39**), General Middleton's 1st US Army with three

corps (5, 7 and 8) was holding a front of about 200 kilometres from Aachen to Echternach. Ardennes sector was lightly held with about 70,000 troops. 7 Corps was deployed in the North along River Ruhr from Eupen / Verviers to Aachen, and 5 Corps was deployed in the Centre from Verviers to Schonberg. 99 Infantry Division, a 'green' unit arrived in November was deployed. While 2nd Infantry Division, which was about to launch a limited offensive was also in the area. 8 Corps was in the South from St. Vith to Echternach. 14 Cavalry Group taskforce was in area of *Losheim Gap*, an east – west corridor, almost seven miles wide. 106 Infantry Division had taken defensive position on the Our River only three days earlier. Southern half of 8th Corps front was held by a depleted 28th Division. The Division had lost 6000 men in fighting in Hurtgen Forest around Aachen in November and was sent to Ardennes for refitting. It was deployed on a 50 kilometres area along the Our River. Further south, Combat Command A with 9th Armoured Division was on the Sauer River and 4th Infantry Division was covering the approaches to the city of Luxembourg.

Allies were operating on exterior lines of operation with 21st Army Group (along with 1st and 9th Armies ex 12th Army Group) in the north and 6th and 12th Army Groups in the south of Ardennes (**Map-40**). Initially after the Normandy landing, complete Allies forces were being maintained from their base in northern France. However, subsequently with the capture of port facilities of Antwerp in Belgium, both army groups were maintained from separate bases of operation.

The Germans planned to launch the offensive, code named "Watch on the Rhine", with three armies under Field Marshal Model's Army Group B. Field Marshal Von Rundstedt was appointed C-in-C West to exercise overall

supervision. The design was to cause division between Allied forces by hitting at their seam through a central rupture in the weakly held defences of American 1st Army in Ardennes thus cutting their main supply base of Antwerp. After the initial foothold, German Panzers had to dash to the Meuse to seize crossings between Liege and Namur - covering over 80 kilometres area in about two days - and finally wheel Northwest towards Brussels and Antwerp. Ultimate aim enunciated by Hitler was to force 21 Army Group to evacuate the continent or cause another Dunkirk. Main effort was to be launched in the north by 6th SS Panzer Army, comprising 9 divisions (4 SS Panzer, 5 Infantry) on 35 kilometres front in area Losheim (North of Schnee Eifel). Initially, 1st SS Panzer and 67th Corps were to clear the crust of Allies defences. Later, the 2nd SS Panzer Corps, with two Panzer divisions were to breakout towards Meuse to secure bridges on River Meuse between Liege and Huy and thereafter wheel north-west to capture Antwerp.

Secondary effort was in the Centre (Schnee Eifel) with 5th Panzer Army comprising 7 divisions (3 Panzer and 4 Infantry) and was to advance on two routes with a Corps each across Our River. After capturing Bastogne, it was to cross the Meuse between Namur and Dinant and push towards Brussels. It was to remain on the south of 6th Army to provide flank protection against Allied counterattacks by holding the line Antwerp-Brussels-Namur-Dinant. Auxiliary effort with 7th Army comprising 4 divisions (3 Infantry and 1 Parachute) was to push to the Meuse. This effort was aiming to provide flank protection to 5th Panzer Army from Allies reactions from the south. 15th Army with 700 tanks, deployed north of Ardennes in the holding role, was tasked to fix Allied forces in Aachen area (Operation Nordwind) and provide flank protection

to 6th SS Panzer Army. Three infantry and one panzer division were kept as Theatre Reserve while one infantry division was available with Army Group B.

Hitler included several special operations in the overall offensive plan. In Operation Grief, 150 Brigade comprising 3,300 of English speaking commandos with captured US equipment and wearing American uniforms had two fold tasks. Otto Skorzeny, who had rescued Mussolini from a 'veritable fortress manned by superior numbers of Italian guards' and prevented, at gunpoint, the Hungarian Government from signing a separate peace with Allies, was its commander. The force was to act as advance guard for 6th Army and seize bridges across Meuse River intact, and infiltrate Allied lines, disrupt communication and spread rumours. Colonel Freidrich Von Der Heydte's parachute battalion comprising 1,250 men was tasked to seize vital road junctions for the 6th Army advance (Operation Stosser). This airborne assault was included in the plan just eight days before the offensive by Hitler.

Due to the layout of the frontiers between Germans and the Allies, relative strength of forces and disposition of Allied forces on flanks of the Ardennes, Germans decided to launch their offensive through Ardennes operating on Interior Lines. German base of operation was located east of River Rhine from where all the forces were being maintained. Their offensive was to be launched through weakly held defences of Ardennes by penetration or central rupture, secure bridgehead over River Meuse and develop manoeuvre towards Brussels and Antwerp.

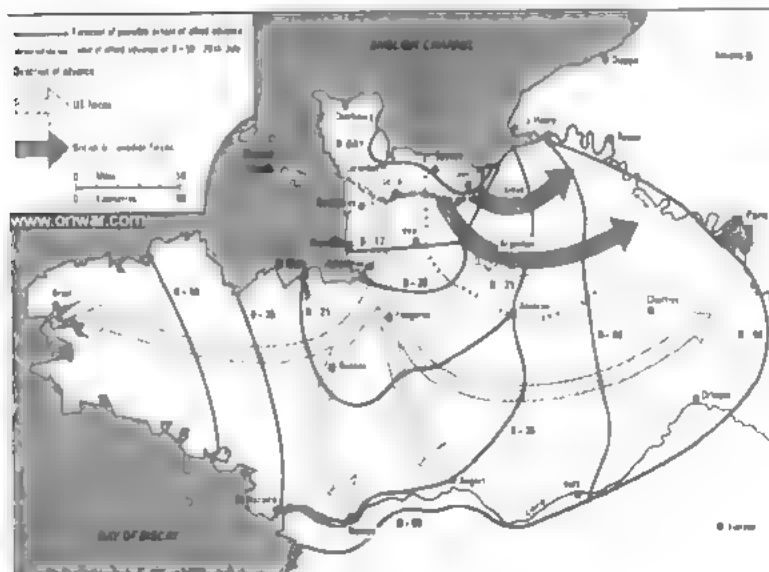
Perhaps the greatest accomplishment of the Germans was the accumulation of resources to even attempt this level of offensive. Though never reaching the 32 divisions initially identified by the plan, Hitler fielded 26 to 29

(figures vary) divisions, consisting of 300,000 troops, 1600 to 1800 tanks (figures vary) and over 1900 artillery pieces. This was a truly remarkable feat. The preceding six months witnessed the decimation of the once powerful Wehrmacht. The war had cost Germany four million men; its finest divisions were almost totally destroyed. Losing almost 2,000 armoured vehicles in the battles for France, the Western Front had only 130 tanks and a 2 – to – 1 deficit in manpower. Implementing drastic, inflexible procedures, Hitler amassed a tremendous force. Thinning defensive sectors, divisions were pulled from the line and refitted. Recruiting efforts included men aged 16 to 60 and manpower moved from garrisons, the Luftwaffe and other rear area elements were to flesh out new divisions. Collaborators and recruits from occupied countries were also utilized to meet the needed manpower requirements.

In spite of relentless Allied bombing, German industrial output was almost at an all-time high. Priority for new equipment shifted from front-line defences to the new “reserve”. Though the time necessary to accumulate these resources prompted Hitler to delay the operation several times, finally fixing 16 December 1944 for the offensive, he had accomplished what the Allies had viewed as impossible. Of course, men and materiel provided for only two-thirds of the equation for success. In addition to logistic limitations and insufficient air support, training this force to the level necessary could not be accomplished and proved to be the Achilles heel.

With potential success heavily weighed on the element of surprise, remarkable efforts for deception were also affected. Radio silence was imposed and officers escorted by Gestapo agents were to hand-carry all orders and plans. The name for the operation, “Watch on the Rhine”, implied the anticipated defence of the German

heartland along the Rhine River. Rundstedt's appointment as Commander Western Front (considered a cautious and defensive commander) also reinforced the Allies perceptions that Germany was preparing for defensive operations. The location of the 6th Army was intentionally exposed to appear positioned to counter the planned Allied offensive into the Ruhr Valley. The 5th Army stayed in the defensive line and pulled out appearing to re-fit for defence. Trains moving the vast quantities of men and materiel moved only at night and hid in tunnels during the day. Troops staged in the concealment of the Ardennes were issued smokeless charcoal to preserve the secrecy of their location. Movements into attack positions were carefully orchestrated to minimize observation and Allied concern. Reconnaissance and patrols were forbidden. Unit commanders were threatened with execution if information was compromised. Finally, Hitler counted on and received the predictable bad weather that precluded much of the aerial reconnaissance that played a huge role in the Allied blurred intelligence picture. All of this played on Allied perceptions and confidence that the Wehrmacht had become incapable of a major offensive.

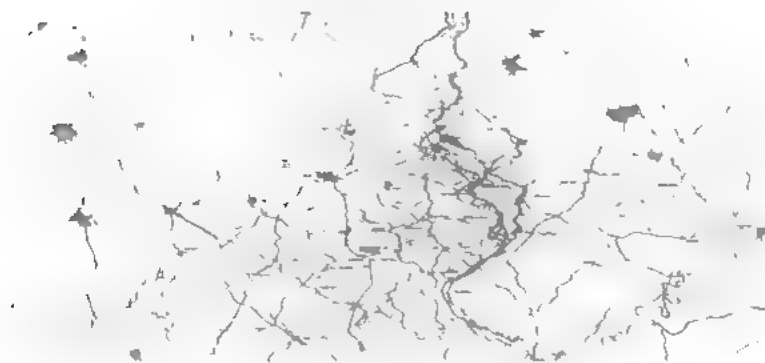
**Map 36: Normandy Landing Plan****Map 37: Operation Cobra**

**Map 38: Situation on German Western Front  
December 1944**





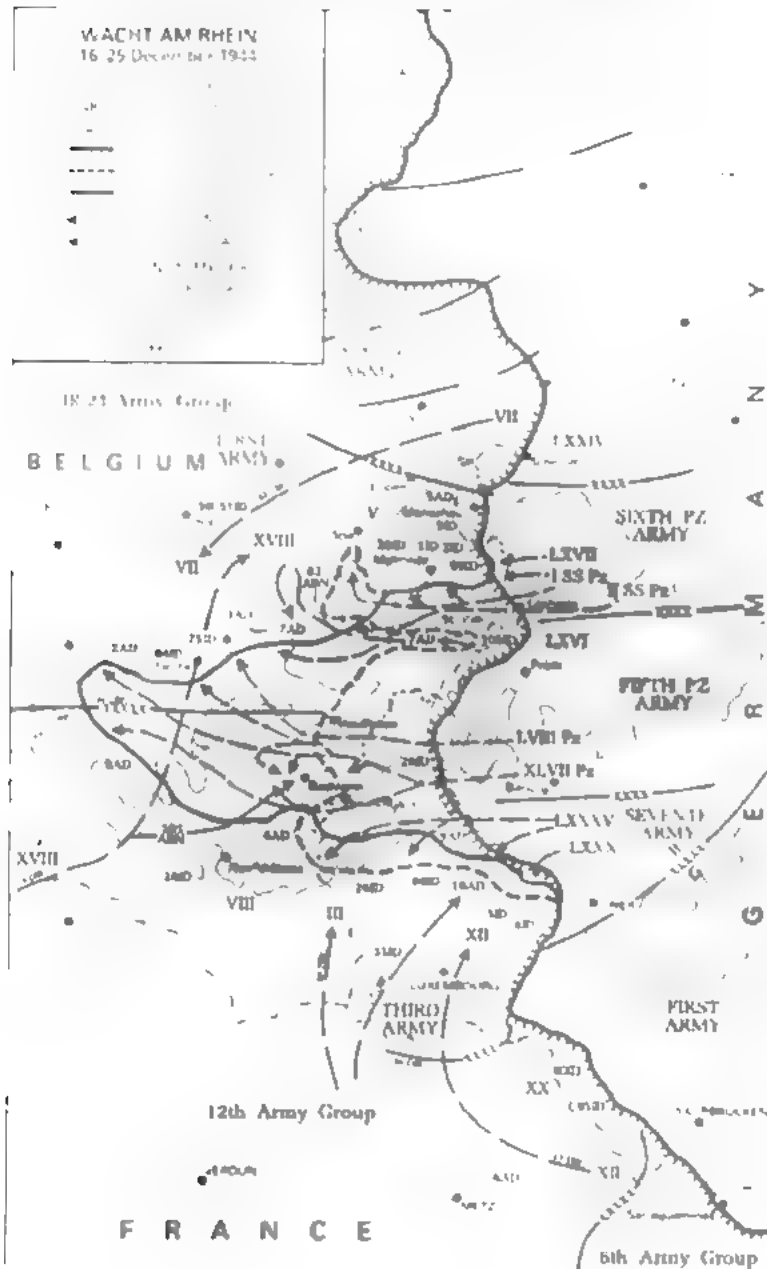
**Map 39: Allied Defensive and  
German Offensive Plan**



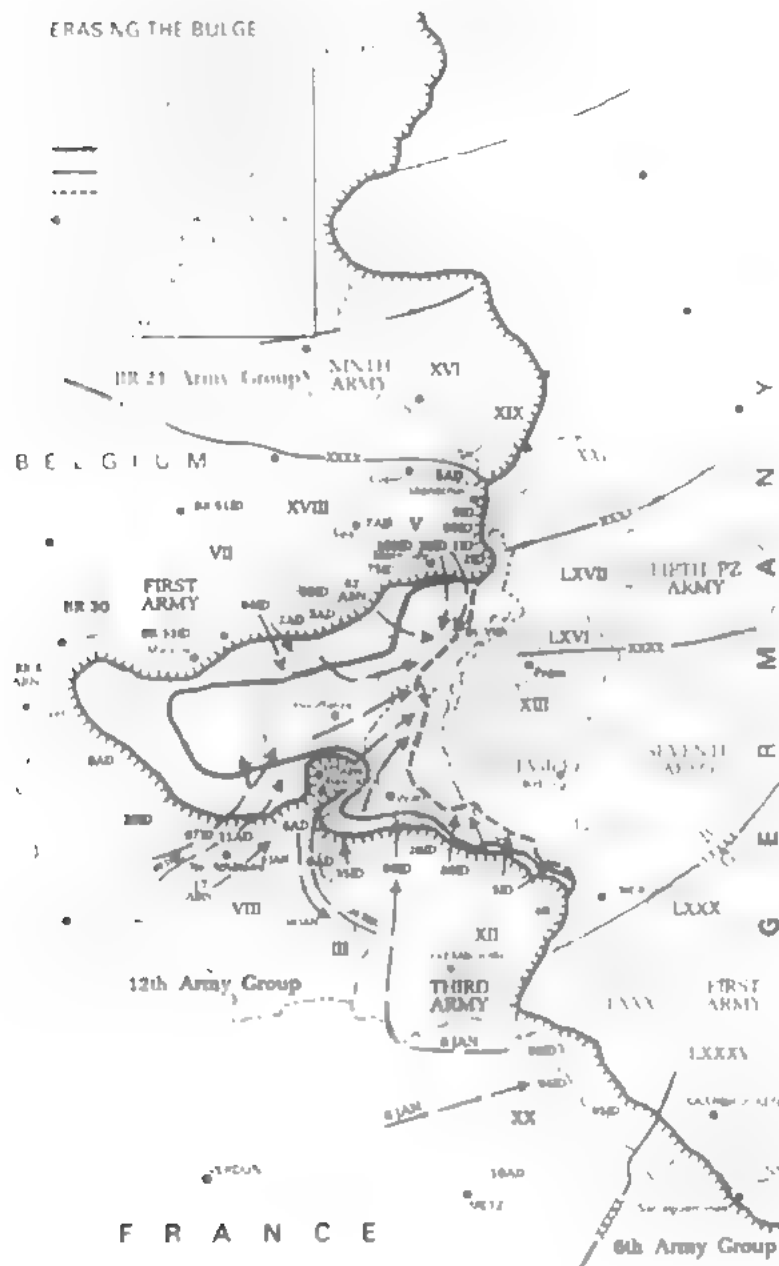
**Map 40: Allied Counter Moves**



### Map 41: Limits of German Penetration



# Map 42: Allied Counter Offensive



### *CHAPTER - III*

## **CONDUCT OF THE BATTLE**

While bulk of the Allied forces was on offensive towards East, General Bradley, counting on the defensive strength of the terrain, was holding his line in the Ardennes with minimum forces. After many postponements and hectic preparations, on 16 December 1944, the German infantry moved unnoticed through the dark Ardennes shrouded in the morning fog, under heavy bombardment, guided by searchlight beams overhead. The German attack came as a complete surprise for Allies. At first, the American defenders believed this was only a feint. As reports regarding the attack started pouring in from various Headquarters down the line, no Allied commander right up to Eisenhower was clear whether it was just a diversion or a major offensive. Though later Allies controlled the situation, it cost them 70,000 casualties to contain the German counter offensive and further delayed their offensive towards Germany.

Main effort was launched on the Northern Sector with 6th SS Panzer Army's operation. On 16 December 1944, the attack began with infantry assault over a 25 kilometres front in general area Losheim (**Map-41**). The American defence of the key areas Berg-Butgenbach-Elsenborn prevented the Germans from capturing the northern shoulder as planned. On 17 December, the 1st Panzer Division made a push to outflank Liege from the south and one Battle Group (kampfgruppe) Peiper, the spearhead of

Main Effort, pressed forward in its drive to seize Meuse crossings at Huy. Despite his bold action to dent the Allies' lines, he decided to move towards Malmedy in the west as per the orders. If he would have swung towards north the chances were that 2nd and 99th divisions, the 30,000 soldiers would have been cut off along the Elsenborn Ridge. By mid day 19 December, this column which had advanced and captured Stavelot (35 kilometres) crossed Ambleve River and pushed towards Trois Point. He was frustrated by blown up bridges on Salm River. Low on fuel and ammunition, boxed by channelling terrain and stalled by engineers, he took up defensive positions. By this time Stavelot had also been counter attacked and cut off. By evening 19 December the German General Staff realized that the breakthrough was not possible by the Main Effort. German 6th Army pounded Elsenborn Ridge for three days (20th to 23rd), but made no advances and lost another 100 tanks. On 22 December it became quite clear that 6th Army's offensive had come to a halt. Peiper was cut off and airdrops had failed to sustain him and finally on 23rd December, with his remnants (800 men), he started infiltrating back to the German lines. The Main Effort of 6th Army failed to pursue initial successes due to presence of 2nd Infantry division to contest the German advance and timely release of US 7th Armoured Division by US 1st Army.

Special Forces operations initiated with the parachute drops. On the night of 16 December 1944, about 1000 – 1250 (figures vary) German Paratroopers were dropped near the junction of two roads leading into Malmedy. Only about 300 – 350 (figures vary) actually landed in the area as only 11 – 35 (figures vary) of the 106 aircrafts, manned by inexperienced pilots, made it through Allied

air defence to drop zones. However, link up could not take place with the Panzer spearheads due to their slow progress. On 20 December, the group started ex-filtrating and in the process many of them were captured. However, it managed to create some panic and resultantly one entire brigade of 3rd Armoured Division was tied up for one week to deal with this threat. In the first wave, about 40 teams (jeep borne) of English speaking commandoes of Skorzeny's 150 Brigade, wearing US uniforms managed to infiltrate and caused some confusion and panic in the rear areas. It even forced Allies to beef up the security of Eisenhower in Paris, adversely affecting his freedom of movement due to excessive security measures. However, this action failed to achieve any appreciable military gains due to limited strength and resources.

Central Sector was subjected to secondary effort spearheaded by 5th Panzer Army. German attack against Schnee Eifel (over 30 kilometres wide) being defended by 106 Division, which arrived in the sector on 12th December, was the most successful operation of the entire offensive. Two regiments of 106 Division with 7,000 men with all their equipment surrendered, while 5th Army was successful in making the wedge in Losheim Gap, an east-west corridor, almost seven miles wide. Despite initial setback, American forces however, put up stiff resistance in defence of strategically important communication centre of St. Vith, which was initially defended by 500 men was reinforced by 7th Division. Having failed to reduce St. Vith, Germans finally bypassed it on 19 December. 82nd Airborne Division reinforced the defences of St. Vith. The follow up infantry however maintained constant pressure on the town and on 22 December St. Vith eventually fell to the Germans. The attack by 58 and 47 Panzer Corps to

penetrate the front lines of 28 Division succeeded on first day of the offensive in splitting the Division and forcing it to withdraw. The main thrust was delivered by 58 Corps; after crossing River Our drove towards Houffalize with the aim of gaining bridgehead over Meuse between Town of Ardenne and Namur, whereas 47 Corps was to capture Bastogne and drive on to gain crossings on Meuse south of Namur. By night 17 December the Germans were approaching Houffalize and Bastogne. German attempt to rush through the town of Bastogne was foiled due to timely arrival of 101 AB Division ex SHAEF Reserve and reinforcement of the defences on 19 December. Having failed to capture the town, the Germans bypassed it on 20 Dec 1944. On 23 December clear weather allowed the Allied air force to launch many attacks on Germans as well as re-supply the besieged garrison through airdrops. On 25th December, Germans made an all out effort to clear Bastogne but failed. Finally, US 4 Armoured Division ex Patton's 3rd Army fought its way up from the south and made contact with the Garrison on 26 December and thus the siege was raised.

Meanwhile German Panzer divisions bypassing Bastogne pushed on towards Meuse and 2nd Panzer Division captured Celles on 23 December, barely 8 kilometres from the Meuse and Dinant. To cover the crossings British 30 Corps had been moved around Givet and Dinant while the bridges were prepared for demolition. From 23rd December onwards, as the weather cleared, panzer forces were also attacked by the Allied air force. Due to counter attack by US 7 Corps (by 2nd US Armoured Division), Celles was regained on 25 December and despite arrival of, though belated, 9 Panzer Division ex OKW reserves, the Germans started falling back. On

26 December it was realised and acknowledged by the Germans that the line of River Meuse was unattainable.

The 7th Army, which was part of auxiliary effort in Southern front after crossing River Our also failed to break through the American lines. However, 5 Para Division on the inner flank managed to contact Wiltz, about 18 kilometres, in three days. The Allies, put up stiff resistance and by 19 December the southern shoulder of German attack was contained and lay exposed to Allied reactions. Due to fear of counter attacks from Patton's 3rd Army, 80 Corps went on the defensive thus practically bringing the operations of 7th Army to an end. Hitler launched Operation Nordwind in first week of January 1945 to divert the Allied attention through a surprise attack in Alsatian Plains. The operation being part of 7 Army along with three extra divisions, i.e. 6 SS Mountain, 7 Para and 10 SS Panzer Divisions was aimed at keeping the Allies off balance and to prevent them from regrouping. The operation, directed by Himmler, began on 1st January as a double pincer closing in at Alsatian plains. However, this time the Allies forces were ready for it as their intelligence staff had predicted exact day of attack. Although the Germans succeeded in crossing the Rhine north of Strasbourg and gained ground towards the north from Colmar pocket, they suffered heavy casualties and the Allied situation was stabilised without loss of any important terrain feature. The coalition was however tested when Eisenhower was initially willing to give ground, i.e. Strasbourg, a French town, to preserve forces. He however succumbed to pressure from General Charles de Gaulle, who insisted that the town be defended at all cost. He even threatened to abandon the Allied force structure and hold independent operation. Hitler also



mounted Operation Bodenplatte, a massive air campaign intended to cripple the Allies Air Force while still on the ground. Though after achieving surprise on the New Year Day attack as well as the destruction of 206 Allied aircrafts at sixteen airfields in Holland and Belgium, yet the loss to the Luftwaffe of 277 irreplaceable planes and pilots spelled the end of the once feared air arm of the Wehrmacht.

### **Allied Counter Actions (Battle of Bulge)**

Although German offensive took Allied commanders totally by surprise but as soon as they appreciated the scale of offensive they were quick to recover and react. Eisenhower immediately stopped the planned offensives in the north and south of Ardennes into Germany. In the south General Patton's 3rd Army was ordered to move north. In the north Field Marshal Montgomery's 21st Army Group, was temporarily given operational control of both the US 9th and 1st Armies and tasked to eliminate the bulge from the north. On 17 December, General Eisenhower ordered some reinforcements/ readjustments: 18 AB Corps (82 and 101 AB Divisions) was to reinforce 1st US Army in Bastogne; two armoured divisions, i.e. 7 ex 9 US Army and 10 ex 3 US Army were asked to reinforce 8 Corps defences; 17 AB and 11 Armoured Division were to join 12 Army Group under General Bradley; and 6 AB Division from England was to join Montgomery's 21st Army Group

Eisenhower held meetings with senior commanders and gave his intent, considering it an opportunity rather than a threat. It was vital that shoulders of Allied defences bordering the German penetration be tightly held that could subsequently serve as pivots for manoeuvre. The intent was to limit the bulge between St. Vith and Bastogne.

Piecemeal commitment of reserves and temptation to lure each individual reinforcement into the battle be avoided. As it was believed that piecemeal employment of reserves would only result in the overwhelming of those formations by the momentum of advance. Line of denial was identified as line Luxembourg - River Meuse - Liege, beyond which no penetration was to be allowed.

The Germans had reached their culminating point and the German Armies now could only wait for the expected Allied counter attacks. For the Allies, having contained and suitably conditioned the German offensive, the time was now ripe for a counter stroke (**Map-42**). While considering the point of attack on the Bulge it was decided to attack in the middle, (rather than the base) which was considered to be the preferable option due to availability of roads. On 22 December, the first counter attack by Patton's 3rd Army was launched, on a 20 mile front, on the southern flank of the Ardennes bulge after effecting a change in its strategic direction from east to north towards Bastogne and had raised its siege on 26th December. In the north, the attack was launched on 3 January 1945 as Field Marshal Montgomery first wanted to stabilize the front before counter attacking. 7 Corps ex 1st Army began to press from the north (with 18 AB Corps in the East and British 30 Corps in the West). On 16 January patrols from 1st and 3rd Armies finally linked up at Houfallize and on 23 January, 1st Army re-took St. Vith. From now on, for the German forces the process of a painful withdrawal back to the Rhine was to begin, thus bringing the last great German offensive of World War - II to a rather sorry conclusion. By 26 January 1945, the complete German penetration was eliminated and the Germans were again back to the point from where they had started.

The Ardennes counter offensive turned out to be very costly to both the sides in terms of losses in men and material. The details of casualties are as under: -

Battle Casualties / Losses		
Category	Germany	Allied
Personnel (Killed/wounded/captured)	1, 20,000	81,000
Tanks	800	733
Aircraft	600	592

## *CHAPTER - IV*

### **ANALYSIS**

Towards the end of 1944, the Allies were on the offensive in every theatre of war, the German Army was in full retreat, and their air force and navy had already lost the battle. On the Eastern Front massive Russian concentrations were about to march onto German soil. In this bleak scenario, Hitler was confronted with two basic choices, either to concentrate at a narrower front and put up a resolute defence, or launch an offensive and hope for providence. The first choice could have been more logical and pragmatic, but Hitler lived up to his character and chose the most remote possibility of launching an offensive. By choosing to attack, Hitler believed that if his panzer armies could split the Western Allies, they would accept a stalemate on their front and allow him to switch his reserves to the east. Then, he thought that the Russians, in turn, might offer terms which would more or less leave their armies where they were. These assumptions were, of course, completely mistaken, for nothing short of a German nuclear weapon could possibly have, by December 1944, stopped the Western Allies and Russia from occupying Germany.

If on the other hand, all the German forces were pulled back to present a concentrated defence of German soil, the only result would have been to postpone defeat. The abandoned space would have been quickly absorbed and Allies could have easily concentrated their entire

firepower on relatively smaller area. The final result, albeit at greater cost would have been the same, i.e. an unconditional surrender by Germany. The alternatives available for launching offensive (in order to gain decisive success) by German Army were basically limited to Eastern Front against the Russians, the Western Front against Western Allies and towards the south in Italy against the rapidly advancing US forces. The decision to attack in the West was largely influenced by many varied factors. Effects of German success in the west were envisaged on further operations of the Allies if their 30 or so divisions were destroyed. Such a loss would have made little or no difference to the Russians but it represented one third of the Western Allies. There was no comparable strategic objective within reach on the Eastern Front, whereas the port of Antwerp was strategically significant objective in the west. In the east, the Soviet Union's apparently inexhaustible manpower resources and its advantage of vast spaces would have frustrated German efforts to gain a strategic success. Offensive in the west would expand security parameter of the German industrial zone of Ruhr District. A slice through the Allied Front along its national seam would shake the Alliance, forcing them to accept the Armistice on better bargaining terms and allowing to keep Germany as a whole.

Hitler underrated the Americans as soldiers, being convinced that they would crumble if hit hard enough, thus demanding their withdrawal from Europe under the impact of massive crises and public opinion. If the Eastern and Western front had been ruled out the only other place was Italy, but there the railway network was inadequate to carry the bulk of men and material for the offensive. Road movement, if resorted to, would have been easily detected by Allied Air Reconnaissance

The essential element of surprise would have been lost. Even if successful, the strategic effects would not have been the same as capture of Antwerp promised on future operations of Allies.

### **Offensive Options in the West**

After having decided that offensive would be launched from the West, Germans weighed five possible courses of action to realize Hitler's intention. These were: *Operation Holland* - consisting of a single-thrust attack to be launched from the bridgehead of Venlo with the objective Antwerp; *Operation Liege - Aachen* - double envelopment with the Main Effort originating in the area of northern Luxembourg, driving through the Ardennes in a north-westerly direction, then turning north to meet a Secondary Effort launched simultaneously from the area northwest of Aachen with the objective of destroying the Allied forces in that salient; *Operation Luxembourg*, a two-pronged attack from central Luxembourg and the area of Metz with the objective Longvy; *Operation Lorraine*, through envelopment, aimed at gaining Nancy and Vesoul; and *Operation Alsace*, again through envelopment, aimed at gaining Vesoul.

The choices were soon reduced to the first two solutions because they offered the best prospects of a decisive success. From a strategic point of view Operation Holland was tempting, but was recognized to contain an element of grave risk. The second course, Liege-Aachen, which was later to become known as the "small solution", appeared more likely to succeed. Faced with these two alternatives, Hitler reached the momentous decision of combining them in what von Runstedt, student of von Schlieffen, sarcastically characterized as an operational idea that could "almost" be called a stroke of genius. With

this "big solution," however, Hitler gave the offensive two objectives to be attained with a force perhaps adequate only for one.

Some of the reasons behind this decision were tactical; others were psychological and find their explanations only in Hitler's personality. Hitler considered the opportunity to slice through the Allied front along its national seam, thus adding to expected military crisis the cumulative effect of anticipated political disunion. Then strategic and psychological importance of Antwerp, seemingly within the reach of a bold thrust, if speedily executed, pushed him to the choice. He was convinced about the weakness of the Allied dispositions in the Ardennes sector, inviting repetition of the classic breakthrough victories in 1914 and 1940. Suitability of the wooded Eifel for concealing a large-scale build-up and achieving surprise, and the overriding psychological incitement, however, for undertaking the venture of a great counteroffensive was Hitler's recurring illusion that his military genius would permit him to regain the initiative and decisively alter the course of the War.

Proponents of the 'small solution' (the Liege-Aachen Operation), mainly Field Marshals von Rundstedt and Walter Model, based their objections to Hitler's concept upon few considerations. The forces which were available for an objective so ambitious were inadequate. There was serious lack of reserves to hold the shoulders and feed the offensive. Such uncertainty also prevailed that the forces Hitler had promised could be held in reserve until the start of the offensive, in view of the impending resumption of Allied attacks. This conviction was rampant among them that the offensive, as planned by Hitler, would result only in a bulge in the American lines and not in the destruction of sizable Allied forces.

Hitler categorically rejected all pleas in favour of the "small solution," and in his Operational Directive of 10 November 1944 marked the distant objective of Antwerp and even the disposition of the attack forces as "unalterable". To get what he wanted, he freely disregarded the counsel of his advisers and commanders, staking everything on what General Jodl later called "an act of desperation". Hitler's design of operation depended on speed, surprise, capture of Allied logistic installations for furtherance of operation, reliance on bad weather to compensate for inferiority of air force, driving a wedge between the American and the British by hitting at their seam and capture of Antwerp to choke Allied forces lines of communication. He believed that by this design, he would force the Allies to sue for peace and would be free to deal with the Russians on the Eastern Front. By and large Hitler's design of achieving his ultimate objective with limited resources was marred with wrong calculations and was not in harmony with the prevalent operational environment. It falls into the category of daring and perhaps that is why it is known as Hitler's Last Gamble. Germans lacked the means to fulfil this gamble which, if successful, may or may not have altered the outcome of World War-II.

A traditional offensive operation cycle goes through preparatory, breakthrough, exploitation and destruction phases. In Ardennes offensive, Germany successfully carried out initial two stages of operation cycle, i.e. assembly of 30 divisions and breakthrough. However, due to logistic problems and timely reactions of Allies, it could not exploit or achieve envisaged destruction thus the offensive operation cycle was not completed. A classical defensive operation cycle entails battle of attrition / delay, counter stroke and battle of destruction. Allies, after



overcoming initial shock, were able to delay progress of Panzer armies, denied them access to critical space and launched a successful counter attack to eliminate the Bulge. Thus, the Allies took over initiative and completed the defensive operation cycle.

Despite the fact that in 1944, the German war effort was at its lowest ebb, they still managed to amass 30 divisions including many panzer formations. Grouped into three armies, these divisions were concentrated at the point of attack against five US infantry divisions and one weak armoured division thus achieving numerical superiority of 5:1. Within a span of 2-3 days, the Allies reinforced their defensive effort by two more divisions and an armoured division thus improving their ratio to 1:4. Elsenborn in 99 Division, St. Vith in 106th US Infantry Division, and Bastogne in 28th US Infantry Division's area coupled with weather and terrain proved to be the currency for time, space and relative strength. It was due to an unusual delay caused onto the Panzer armies' advance towards west that the 21 Army Group under Montgomery had time to move southwest and take up defensive positions along the Meuse. This delay also bought time for reinforcing the embattled defences in the centre and for turning around of Patton's 3rd Army from east to north and start with its counter attack. It was dogged resistance put up by these two divisions and the problems of inhospitable terrain that broke the tightly managed timetable affecting time and space bondage of German forces. A dangerously grave element in the structure of Hitler's consideration was the gross underestimation of Allied strength and determination and, conversely, an exaggerated overrating of the power and effectiveness of his own forces, especially the elite SS panzer divisions.

Ardennes was a restricted area, which curtailed the space for manoeuvre and thus the liberty of action. Space bounded by Bastogne, St. Vith, Trois Point, Liege and Namur was critical for furtherance of German offensive towards ultimate strategic objective of Antwerp. This fact was correctly identified by both sides. The German penetration into the Allied front was insufficient in view of the forces employed and the limited infrastructure available. On the other hand Allies successfully defended the critical space that was essential for the Germans to develop their offensive.

### **Notions of Operational Strategy**

The Allied *centre of gravity* in the West laid in coalition of American and British forces. Having decided to attack in the west, Hitler correctly identified this and planned to cut the Allied forces by striking at the seam (between 21 and 12 Army Groups) through an indirect approach and destroy encircled forces in the north. Accomplishment of this might have enabled Hitler to achieve his political and military aim of dividing the Allies, wiping them out from Western Europe and taking on the stronger Russian forces. In the retrospect his offensive ruffled Military Alliance to a certain degree, however the Political Alliance remained unshakeable. On the German side the centre of gravity laid in their two Panzer armies. Accordingly, this was correctly identified by the Allied after initial breakthrough and every effort was pitched to block the German Main Effort comprising 6th Panzer Army to disturb the (well forward placed) centre of gravity of German offensive. The Main Effort by 6th SS Panzer Army could hardly advance about 30 miles, while the Secondary Effort was stopped 8 kilometres short of River Meuse - the intermediate objective.

At the time of German attack, 21st Army Group under Montgomery, was poised for offensive in the Ruhr in the north and Patton's 3rd Army was ready to debouch into Saar. US 1st Army was thinly holding almost 200 kilometres of frontage in the centre. Within this front main weight of attack of 6th and 5th Panzer Armies was borne by only five infantry divisions and one weak armoured division. It was only due to unexpected resistance capacity of Allied divisions that the bonds of *Time, Space and Relative Strength matrix* did not break and the Allies were able to react in time thus stemming the German tide. Timely reinforcements and speedy and bold employment of reserves at the desired points, inwards wheeling of 21st Army Group and 3rd Army and flexible articulation of command, are all clear manifestations of balance in Allied system of forces. On the German's side, lack of resources in terms of air force and required reserves seriously hampered their offensive. Moreover, Germans had taken out quite a few formations from the Siegfried Line all along the front for the offensive, therefore it created a vulnerability in German's system of forces providing an opportunity to Allies, which they did not exploit. Above all launching of offensive in between two strong Allied prongs poised for offensive, was otherwise liable to be exposed from both flanks right from the outset. Even if the offensive would have succeeded as planned, this very vulnerability would have persisted as such. Once German's Main Effort was bogged down completely and the Secondary Effort was making relatively more progress, Hitler's reserves were released to Main Effort instead of Secondary Effort thus opening the sphere of imbalance for complete system of forces. In the words of Field Marshal Von Rundstedt, "*The aspect of not re-enforcing 5th Army was a fundamental error which unbalanced the whole offensive*".

Allied forces, following the Normandy invasion in June 1944, swept rapidly through France, but soon reached their *culminating point* along the German Border in September 1944, as the long Allied supply lines extending back to the English Channel could not be stretched any further. With 36 divisions in action the Allies were faced with the problem of transporting some 20,000 tons of supplies every day from beaches and ports to the front. The problem was further exasperated by unexpected speed of advance, which in some cases went as fast as 120 kilometres per day. At this stage heavy reliance was still being placed on the wharves where the Allies had initially landed as ports of Antwerp and Calais were still not fully functional. This, however, later proved to be more of an operational pause due to interrupted supplies through sea lines of communication, rather than a culmination point. The Germans planned to reach Antwerp over a distance of 200 kilometres through difficult and restricted terrain. The forces as well as logistics for the operations were considered adequate by Hitler. But once the operation unfolded, they proved to be grossly inadequate. The Main Effort got stalled on 4th day of offensive, i.e. 19 December after hard y advancing 30 miles in depth. The Secondary Effort made better progress but could only advance well short of Meuse. On the 8th day of the offensive, i.e. 23 December, the Germans were still short of even their intermediate objective, i.e. River Meuse. Had the logistics kept pace and the Main Effort crossed Meuse, the Allied reactions would have been very difficult and resultantly the outcome of the battle quite different. Failure of the logistics to keep pace with the offensive and stiff Allied resistance hastened the German *culminating point*, forcing Panzer Armies to halt thus providing critical time to the Allies to bring in reinforcements and eliminate it.

German main effort could not develop requisite impetus, thus, failed to cause dislocation in Allied system of forces. Similarly, the Allied communication was neither seriously disrupted nor severed indefinitely. Eisenhower remained calm and completely in control of the situation. Hence paralysis within the Allied high command did not materialize. Thus it can be summarized that the German Main Effort failed to create the desired main strategic effects.

### **Components of Strategic Decision**

These components of strategic decisions can well be understood in the succeeding paragraphs.

At the time of German's counter offensive in the Ardennes, Allied 21st and 12th Army Groups were poised for objectives in the north (industrial zone of Ruhr) and south (Saar area) of Ardennes respectively. Therefore, though tactically defensive, they had strategic posture on offensive lines. Moreover, Allies had superior strategic orientation. On the other hand Germans had strategically defensive and tactically offensive posture.

Conceptually Hitler's plan to catch the Americans off guard in relatively quiet area of Ardennes, ultimately capture Antwerp and destroying almost 4 Allied armies was both daring and imaginative *strategic objective*. Coalition in retrospect was Allies centre of gravity while Antwerp was geographically as well as economically important being the Channel Port. Though its selection was in consonance with political aims of Hitler, however, when judged against TSR matrix, the odds were so heavily against Hitler that he did not stand even a slim chance of success. Hitler's Generals, being more pragmatic, tended to disagree with him. In an attempted modification of Hitler's scheme,

Field Marshal Model came up with an alternative plan with more manageable dimensions. This 'the small solution', was to break through the American front lines, penetrate some thirty or forty miles and then turn the flanks inward, trapping a large number of American forces (15 divisions or so), capturing their supply dumps east of Meuse, and finally converting the Meuse as new line of defence. If all this had succeeded then a second offensive could be quickly mounted with Antwerp as the objective. Hitler prescribed the ambitious objectives and attached the excessive hopes to a victorious outcome that converted an otherwise strictly tactical operation into a fateful strategic decision.

German offensive was planned along *strategic direction* of Ardennes – Brussels / Antwerp as under : -

- *North.* Along Malmedy – Liege – Antwerp, to take the Main Effort.
- *Centre.* Along Bastogne – Dinant – Namur – Brussels, taking the Secondary Effort.
- *South.* Along Neufchateau – Mezieres, to have the Auxiliary Effort.

The strategic directions met the essentials of operational strategy and led to the strategic objective while splitting Allied armies in the north and south. The two efforts were so placed that these provided security to the manoeuvre and could influence each other. The main and secondary efforts exploited mostly the line of least expectation and thus the line of least resistance, thereby totally surprising the Allies. The major impediment the directions suffered was restricted terrain having limited infrastructure up to Meuse and as well as the most inhospitable weather both denying generation of desired combat power.

During German's offensive, *surprise and deception* plan was conceived and executed with such perfection that it enabled the Germans to achieve complete surprise – the ultimate aim of deception. Their deception theme was that as the American 1st and 9th Armies would achieve a real breakthrough and drive to the Rhine in the sector between Cologne and Bonn; in preparation for this untoward event Hitler was amassing a major counterattack force northwest of Cologne; a secondary and relatively small force of burned out divisions was being gathered in front of Ardennes to contain the right flank of the expected Allied penetration. The plan was to parade the preparations for counter offensive before the Allies. Though bulk of the forces would be discreetly concentrated in the Ardennes, however, partial assembly of 5th and 6th Panzer armies would also take place in the north, which at the last moment, would slip south to join the main build-up in the Ardennes. As the Allied higher command expected the same therefore they bought the plan and ignored all German preparations in the Ardennes area. This was primarily due to Allied mindset, where they only concentrated on their own offensive and never visualized such a venture from Hitler. Moreover, Allies failed to identify the German offensive mainly due to lack of requisite ground and air reconnaissance. Besides others, one of the indicators that Allies were deceived in following spheres was that during December 1944, Montgomery had requested Eisenhower for celebration of Christmas back home.

Operation was code named "*Wacht am Rhein*" (Watch on the Rhine), to mislead the Allies by manifesting a defensive rather than offensive connotation. To lend realism to deception, maximum effort was made to depict assembly of forces in the north, i.e northwest of Cologne.

Military preparations were carried out visibly and radio traffic was conspicuously increased. Additional anti aircraft units were brought into area to attract Allied planes. To add to confusion, ghost 25 Army with complete order of battle having panzer divisions was brought into being on 20 November 1944. Detailed arrangements like construction of quarters for military personnel, sign postings, artillery fire and wireless communication were stepped up and civilians were openly evacuated to give impression that a new defensive army was being formed to counter Allied attack. Allied intelligence head, (who was regarded as an 'alarmist') failed to draw clear deductions from the facts that he had gathered. Resultantly Allies higher command drew mistaken conclusions that the change round of Germans formations was nearly enemy's way of giving new formations the front line experience prior to their employment else where. Field Marshal Rundstedt, in his 70th year, was regarded as a defensive/cautious person and his appointment as Commander Western Front led to the general belief that the Germans were preparing for defensive battle and concentrating their forces in anticipation of likely Allied offensive.

Allied ground forces, making use of *new munitions/technologies*, employed for the first time, the new "Proximity Fuze" for artillery. It was an invention that added immensely to the effectiveness of their firepower. On the other hand Germans used around 100 jet fighters in the last stage of the battle, but could not generate the desired results.

To ensure utmost secrecy and security of the plan, it was kept to the very few. Hitler revealed it to his top military advisors on 16 November, while the formation commanders were informed by 22 November. The unit commanders came to know about the plan on 12



December. Hitler had decreed that everyone involved in the planning process must sign solemn pledges not to discuss it with anyone and to be prepared to face a court-martial if they did. The effort to maintain secrecy was in fact completely successful, despite the daily arrival of hundreds of railway trains with troops and supplies during December 1944. On the other hand due to extraordinary secrecy, officers at execution level remained oblivious to the plans and this above all resulted in such dismal performance of German units. Desired balance between keeping secrecy of the plan and required involvement of affected commanders was not maintained by Hitler.

Ardennes offensive failed to create desired effects, mainly due to inability of German forces to *correlate ends and means*. They were unable to attain desired speed through difficult terrain, insufficient logistics and Allied air power, as well as their superior reactions. Within the offensive grouping of various efforts along with effects achieved are:

*Main Effort* 6 SS Panzer Army in the north having nine divisions, four each armoured and infantry and one parachute division. Main Effort failed to attain desired momentum due to restricted space, stronger defences and timely reaction of allied reserves.

*Secondary Effort.* 5 Panzer Army in the centre with seven divisions, having three armoured and four infantry divisions. This effort in the centre did make better progress, but it lost valuable time of 5 days, while fighting at Bastogne and St. Vith. Bastogne was initially bypassed but the following infantry failed to clear it forcing the armour to recoil. This provided the Allies with necessary time to take remedial actions. Thus, the Germans lost the initiative and liberty of action.

*Auxiliary Effort.* 7 Army in the south with three infantry and one parachute division. This army in the south being very weak, devoid of armour was able to advance hardly 10 miles. It thus left the flank of 5th Panzer Army threatened against Patton's 3rd US Army.

*Strategic Reserves.* Comprised 9 and 15 Panzer Divisions.

The grouping of forces within the efforts ensured combination of power, shock effect and mobility in the right earnest. Since main effects were to be produced by 6 Panzer Army, it was given more Panzer divisions along with Special Forces. However, the German Order of Battle looked like a contest between the Special Forces (SS) and the remaining Army. 6 SS Panzer Army had a lot of such troops because of personal faith of the Fuhrer on these troops. The basis of plan was to execute a flanking movement from the south in general direction of Brussels and Antwerp. 5 Panzer Army being on the outer side of the wheel should have been specially strengthened, which was neither done initially nor subsequently. Auxiliary Effort in the south failed to make any worthwhile contribution. Moreover, grouping of parachute division was faulty as it did not have any such objectives where such a force could be employed. It could have been given to Secondary Effort. The strategic effects of dislocation and paralysis could not be achieved either by main or secondary efforts.

Articulation of command was successfully practiced by the Allies at the Army Group level. On 19 December, when the front was split, Eisenhower placed all forces (including bulk of 1st US Army and 9th US Army) on northern flank of the bulge under Field Marshal Montgomery. On 23 January, 1st US Army was reverted to 12 Army Group whereas 9th US Army was kept engaged with 21

Army Group for coming battle of Rhineland. In case of Germans, the job of German commanders was made difficult by direct intervention of Hitler. In the words of Field Marshal Von Rundstedt, "the Ardennes offensive was planned in all its details, including formations involved, time schedules, objectives and so on, by the Führer and his staff. All counter-proposals were rejected. Under such circumstances, there could be little faith in its success. Even during the attack the Supreme Command conducted the operations by means of liaison officers and direct wireless orders to the armies involved".

The German offensive was launched on a 95 kilometres wide front, while the depth up to the strategic objective was 200 kilometres. Considering that nearly 30 divisions were employed, the scale of offensive seemed unbalanced. Since forces failed to protect their flanks vis-à-vis the narrow frontage, they were subjected to Allied counter attacks both from north and south - a natural phenomenon, if various elements that determine the scale of offensive are not well proportioned. Various other important factors were unfavourable for the attacking armies. Except for 6th Panzer Army which had 4 SS Panzer divisions, most of the other units were relatively untrained and consisted of young recruits recently enlisted in the Army or were troops taken out of air force and navy. Although numbers of German Panzer divisions were quite high, their strength in terms of tanks was low. It was largely paper strength. Average strength of tanks in a Panzer Division was 90-100 only, half of the American scale. Quantitative analysis was also not promising for the Germans - for although there were three German armies in the attack and seven panzer divisions but there were only 1,600 tanks. Germans did not have adequate logistic stamina (especially in terms of fuel and ammunition) to support the kind of offensive they undertook.

In Ardennes offensive, the manoeuvre did not develop necessary *speed and momentum*; therefore desired liberty of action could not be attained. The offensive was slow to progress and it was delayed while clearing Allied opposition around Bastogne, Elsenborn and St. Vith. The offensive had the chances of success if the Panzer armies could dash towards Meuse before the Allied air could be effective – it was not to be. Due to failure to develop necessary initial momentum by the offensive manoeuvre, the advantage in point of time and space was taken by the Allies and they were able to move reserves and reinforcements to threatened areas. While relying on speed through Blitzkrieg experience of 1940, Hitler overlooked the relative strength equation of air and armour in 1944, which was by all means in Allies favour. The terrain and weather were both detrimental to developing the necessary speed; it was December, the worst weather for the operations in that region and not May as was in case of 1940. It would, therefore, not be wrong to conclude that if a single factor was to be named for the failure of Ardennes offensive, it, undoubtedly, would be lack of necessary speed – the reasons for the same notwithstanding.

From September to December, for Ardennes offensive, the Germans were able to concentrate three fresh armies without a clue to Allies. This was a great achievement on the part of Germans, considering the kind of position they were in since June 1944. This *strategic mobility and concentration* entailed movement both by road and rail, which was completed by 15 December 1944, involving the movement of over 150,000 tons of supplies. German Railway and repair crew did a remarkable job by shifting men and materials. However, upon commencement of offensive, the Germans failed to attain desired momentum,

move with the same speed as armour advance mainly because of difficulty in getting supplies from dumps intentionally kept well to the rear in order to give the impression that Hitler had no offensive intentions and was merely preparing to defend the Rhine. Germans expectations that spearheads would move in part on captured fuel dumps was mistakenly optimistic. From 16 to 22 December, logistics were mainly hampered by poor weather conditions and from 23 December onwards Allied air force took on and interdicted German transport columns. The lack of ammunition should be charged to transport failure rather than its paucity at Rhine dumps. Though sufficient replacement of equipment especially tanks were catered for, however, during operation only 1/3 could actually reach the front. Once the German offensive had reached its culminating point, stretching their line of communication in between the two parallel Allied efforts, they exposed their strategic flanks to be severed from north as well as south. Allied correctly identified and exploited this German vulnerability. As Allies had built up supply complexes east of Meuse River, there were no indications that they suffered seriously from lack of fuel. Allies lines of communication, though stretched, remained unaffected mainly because of ineffective Luftwaffe.

Though the weather on the battlefield was shared by the belligerents, but its impact on military operations was not equal in amount and direction. German selection of target date for the commencement of the operation was based on predictions of poor flying conditions. At the start, Germans got cloudy and foggy conditions, helping them in veiling their attacking formations in the absence of Allied air force, thus ensuring rupture of American lines. However by 20 December, combination of rain and snow greatly hampered the speed of German advance as well as

their supply routes. The dramatic weather change on 23 December stripped the German forces of their immunity to air attack as Allied air force could fly again with telling effects on German advancing troops as well as their lines of communication. The weather again worsened on 28 December with snow and blizzards, however, by then the initiative had been passed over to the Allies.

Whereas bad weather coupled with *element of surprise*, initially helped the attacking Germans, clear weather, later on became their worst enemy. The change in weather, which on one hand iced the roads and made them impassable, curtailed ground mobility, and on the other permitted the Allied air forces to resume continuous attacks on German Army. As a result, supply difficulties increased with every passing day, and at the same time mobility of troops sharply decreased. In fact due to air interdiction by Allied air, even the supply of fuel to Germans became so scanty, that it alone was sufficient to stall the offensive. While the Germans failed to sustain their spearhead of the Main Effort with airdrops, Allies did it successfully at Bastogne. Thus it can be concluded that air played a vital role in the final outcome of the Land Battle.

Special forces comprised mainly of two elements, a battalion of parachutist and a brigade of specially trained saboteurs (English speaking German commandos in American uniforms). The *employment of special forces* (as force multiplier) to block road junctions to prevent reinforcements, to seize bridges on River Meuse intact and to cause confusion in the rear areas, was well thought out and appropriately dove tailed in the strategic plan. The fact that the assigned objectives were not achieved in their totality was primarily due to slow progress on the part of Panzer spearheads. Various reasons caused their

failure. Very little briefing for the sake of secrecy resulted in confused and disjointed execution. Of the 106 aircraft that set out for parachute drop on the night of 16/17 December, only 11-35 reached the correct drop zone. A strong wind further scattered the already depleted force. Lack of preparation, poor training and in most cases lack of promised captured (American) equipment all had cumulative effects on the performance of these Special Forces.

Hitler had an instinctive *distrust* of most of his senior generals, while his reliance on his immediate staff was mingled with a realization that they lacked experience of battle conditions. The German decision to launch an offensive in the Ardennes was Hitler's, which clearly overrode the judgement of his military advisers. Therefore, Hitler's commanders had very little faith in the overall plan, as this plan was born of intuitions. Therefore, in such a conception, the cold logic of military reasoning can play no role.

Almost all the German units involved had been refitted after being thoroughly battered in France. The result was a group of *inadequately trained* formations entirely unsuited for the difficult task they had been ordered to perform. Moreover, most of the infantry divisions were Volksgrenadier class, and bulk of their personnel were seeing action for the first time. Lack of training resulted into disjointed efforts, which affected the development of operations adversely.

Media including press in England propagated that Montgomery was dominating the land offensive. It was feared that this out of proportion blow up of Montgomery's role in the campaign may undermine American's role and thus undermine the coalition. Though Montgomery had

expressed his willingness to serve under Bradley, however, he claimed to be the saviour of American forces. There were rumours that Montgomery was to be appointed as Eisenhower's deputy. The Americans mentally did not accept the placing of their troops under British Command.

Though the Germans could claim to have drawn into the battle large number of Allied formations and to have inflicted on them about 80,000 casualties forcing them to recoil and delay their final offensive toward the Rhine River for two months, however, for Germans the offensive could only achieve a temporary respite, and in the words of Von Runstedt, it had literally "broken the backbone of the (German) western front." Factors attributing to German failure in Ardennes offensive are as follow:-

- German forces were incorrectly employed by supreme command.
- Too few divisions were available for the task in hand.
- Germans lacked sufficient fuel, and the fuel that was available, did not come up in time.
- The complete air superiority of Allies.
- Failure to capture critical space bounded by Bastogne – Saint Vith – Liege – Namur.
- Failure in securing strategic flank and exposed shoulders of German offensive effort.
- Bold employment and timely reaction of Allied reserves.
- Weak logistics especially the transport facilities.
- Insufficiently trained German formations.
- Centralization of command in the person of Hitler.

The biggest and immediate effects of the German failure in last offensive in the West were felt in the East. When the Russians opened their biggest offensive on 12



January 1945, it was too late for counter measures. The reinforcements and supplies that could have stopped the advancing Russian armies, had been spent in the forests of Ardennes. The Russians gained an awesome bulge of far greater permanence. They swept across Poland, captured almost all of East Prussia and, finally, came to a halt less than fifty miles short of Berlin. Hitler's desperate gamble in the West had invited disaster in the East and hastened the final and inevitable defeat of Germany. Though the Germans could claim to have drawn into the battle 29 U.S. and 4 British divisions and to have inflicted on them about 80,000 casualties, but the offensive could only achieve a temporary respite for them. The Ardennes had hurt the Allies. They abandoned their attacks on the Ruhr dams and the Saar, and delayed their final offensive toward the Rhine land for two months.

### **Conclusion**

On December 16, 1944, the German Army launched its last great counter-offensive of World War II on the Western Front. Although, unsuccessful, it nevertheless tied down huge amounts of Allied resources, and a slow response to the resulting gap in their lines that erased months from their timetable. This German counter offensive through the Ardennes will long be recalled in American military annals as having inflicted on the 12th US Army Group the first and only serious reverse it suffered in its sweep from Normandy to the Rhine. An alternative analysis is that the offensive allowed the Allies to severely deplete the cream of German army, outside the defences of the West Wall and in poor supply state, greatly easing the assault on Germany afterward. In the end, only a month after the assault, the front line had changed very little. By most accounts, considered an operational/tactical victory for the Allies, the Battle of the Ardennes also had far reaching

strategic implications. The German power potential had weekend to irreparable level and Germany was relegated to defensive delays. Instead of delaying the inevitable, it most likely accelerated the demise of the Third Reich. It reinforced, through adversity, the strength and resolve of the coalition. The most significant outcome was the final lines of advance for Allied forces. By mortgaging the eastern front for his attack, Hitler facilitated the advance of Soviet troops and established the subsequent lines that defined forty five years of division and world tension.

The endless discussion surrounding the Ardennes 's whether Allied victory resulted from what they did or what the Germans failed to do. At strategic level, however, the issue becomes mute. The only hope for German success rested on the disintegration of the Western Alliance and though military cohesion was frayed, the political alliance remained unshakeable. Even an operational victory might not have bailed Germany from Russian Offensive. It may have altered the means, but certainly not the end result. Notwithstanding the results, Battle of Bulge is timeless study because of its historic value for the students of modern day's operation, tactics and doctrines.



American troops man trenches along a snowy hedgerow in the northern Ardennes Forest during the Battle



An American tank moves past another gun carriage which slid off an icy road in the Ardennes Forest, 1945.



Ardennes Offensive-16 December 1944 - 28 January 1945.



Still from captured German film showing Wehrmacht troops advancing past burning American equipment during the Ardennes offensive.



The Ardennes Offensive, December 1944



The Battle of the Bulge (16 December 1944 – 25 January 1945) was a major German offensive campaign launched through the densely forested Ardennes region.

# ***Reflections***

**IMPORTANCE OF STUDY OF  
MILITARY HISTORY  
(PARTICULARLY WORLD WAR – II)  
FOR ARMY OFFICERS**



# I

In our routine discussions very often we refer to a quotation "The history repeats itself". From our experience we know that if not in its entirety yet to a great extent the emerging events do bear some kind of similarity with the events of the past. We all know that there is no substitute for actual experience as the basis for the development of strategic judgement. But there are other strong reasons to believe that military history to a large extent fills in the gap where personal experience is sorely lacking. It is central to how military organizations train and prepare their military commanders to ensure victory in the war. Thus, military history provides one of the only avenues for the military leaders to understand past, current, and present conflicts in their true perspective. The understanding thus acquired reinforces their ability to start or prevent the war and if they ultimately opt to go to war then end the war with the accomplishment of the mission assigned for the operation. At the strategic level the study and understanding of campaigns can hold the future of the conflict zones in the balance. Given the role war and conflict has played and continues to play in modern human civilization, it is hard to understate the value of studying military history. Some people may argue that the actions of the past thinkers and military commanders, taken by them in a different time and place are not relevant to the context in which we may be required to operate today. They may also, very rightly, argue that those commanders and strategists existed in different times, with different geopolitical conditions



and technological capabilities, and the applicability of all those factors to the modern conditions may not be of much value. But the most important aspect which they tend to ignore is that the study of Military History helps in understanding the application of technology, employment of right kind of tactics and the logic for the formulation of a particular strategy which will have close relevance with the successful conduct of the operations even today. In other words study of military history improves the sense of strategic logic and rationality. With regular study of military history the mind acquires the ability to think logically and rationally which helps in making correct strategic judgment.

It is therefore important for commanders at all levels to develop the habit of carrying out analytical study of military history in general and of important campaigns in particular.

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## II

The question as to the relevance of lessons of history in later times has always had its doubters. We must proceed from this doubt, because the future can only be improved upon when a genuine urge and curiosity to understand the past is evidenced. The past is the only data we have, and historical enquiry must be directed to glean from this data, patterns of behaviour whose enduring nature makes them relevant to our own times and problems. In deciding which lessons from the past apply to the present (and which do not), study of history develops for us the intuitive ability to make the choice.

This is particularly so for military history. In the nearly 3,500 years of recorded history, only 283 years have seen no war. It is the longest, most persistent, continuous and enduring of human activity, influencing all aspects of man's life - science, politics, religion, art, technology, economy, culture, society etc. How can we ignore its lessons? Moreover, no two wars have been alike: numerous variables make every war, every battle and every skirmish a unique episode. Therefore, how can we make the Napoleonic period, for instance, relevant to military affairs today?

The idea is not to apply Napoleonic solutions to our current problems, but to try to fathom how Napoleon approached his problems: how he amassed facts, how he sifted them, how he arrived at conclusions. And, then, armed with this broader perspective, tackle our own problems. The study of Alexander the Great, again,

still offers relevant insights into the exercise of military, economic, and political power at the highest level; while a good biography of King Gustavus Adolphus of Seventeenth Century Sweden offers a case history in the application of theory to the problems of reorganizing a military system. In the leadership arena, it shows the great importance of character and integrity. Clausewitz saw war as a phenomenon that could only be understood by dissecting its chameleon character - changing, adapting, responding to the spirit that affects it. And, Liddell Hart emphasized that what we learn from history is not what to do, but what to strive for and what pitfalls to avoid - to be able to see one's situation more clearly in order to prepare. It also performs a utilitarian function by allowing soldiers to understand and enforce peace - by looking upon war as a whole, linking its activities to the peace from which it rises and to the peace to which it returns.

Thus, for serious military students, reliance on military history and its lessons is not only important but necessary to chart a course for the future. The modernists who believe that old paradigms are obsolete, do not realize that strategies for future wars will continue to concentrate on control of opposing minds - only the means will change and the fog of war will assume new, more complex dimensions. Wars will be won in the future as in the past by learning how to defeat the opposing will.

Although the three centuries preceding the two Great Wars of the 20th Century are full of historical lessons and insights, lessons from World War II are a special treasure trove of knowledge. WW II spanned the entire globe, involving huge forces with ever newer technologies and doctrines, across vast terrain and varied environments, in brutal encounters. To a student of military history,

it provides valuable insights into every area of human conflict: the interplay of politics, military and economics; lessons in application of strategy, doctrine and tactics; an ideal testing bed for new technologies, innovations and concepts.

I am particularly pleased to see that the NDU has taken initiative to present some of these aspects from this period of world history to a larger audience within our military. It will without doubt benefit both old and new hands in applying the knowledge to contemporary conflicts. I am sure we will see a sequel to this compilation of presentations covering the numerous other areas that WW II inspires us to discover.

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### III

People often view Captains of War as mere soldiers. They actually need to be far more. War is the ultimate Chess Game; in which the pawns are real soldiers that die and the fall of the Queen is the fall of a nation.

Despite repeated lessons, modern warfare, since the advent of WMD, tends to look at war as a mere technological game, wherein technological superiority guarantees victory. This is as great a fallacy as the earlier belief that numbers guaranteed victory.

Depending on a realistic definition of history, from Vietnam to Iraq and Afghanistan mighty armies with the best technology have failed to achieve their military and political aims. **I define this as defeat.**

An analytical study of military history provides the best insight to the causes of defeat and victory; in both, the realm of Grand Strategy and Operational Strategy. It also frequently underpins why superior tactics assist in the application of successful Operational plans.

Only with that understanding and an imaginative application of the immutable principles of strategy, operational strategy, and tactics that an aspiring soldier can hope to apply these to the increasingly fluid battlefields of the day, and hope to, at least stave off defeat against a superior foe. Analyzing WW II provides the **best opportunity for such an aspirant.**

This book provides a very good analysis of the Grand,

the National, and Military Strategies of both sides at various stages of the War and why these stages resulted the way they did, at each stage. Students of Operational Strategy might look more deeply into each individual operation for analysis.

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